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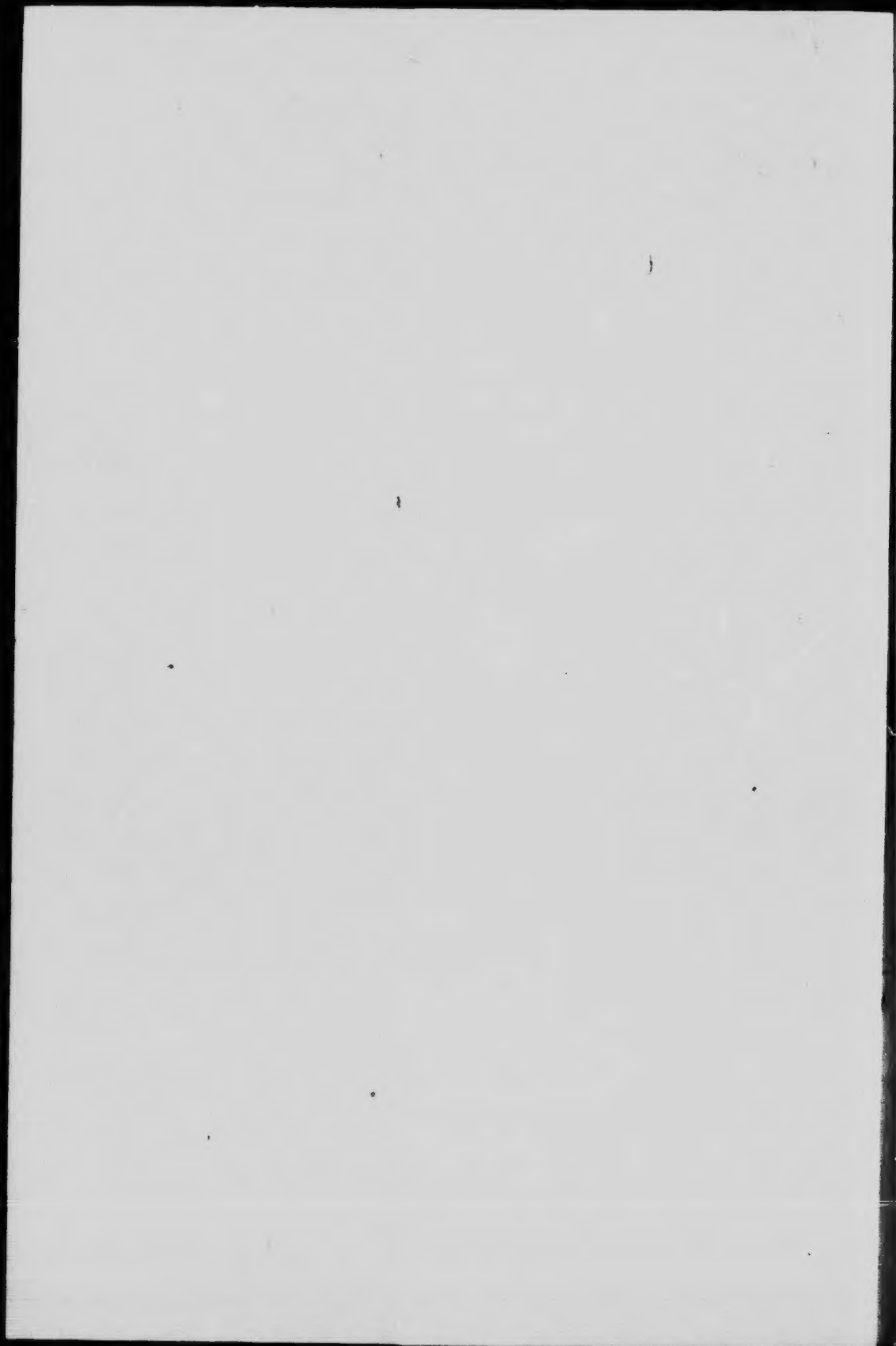
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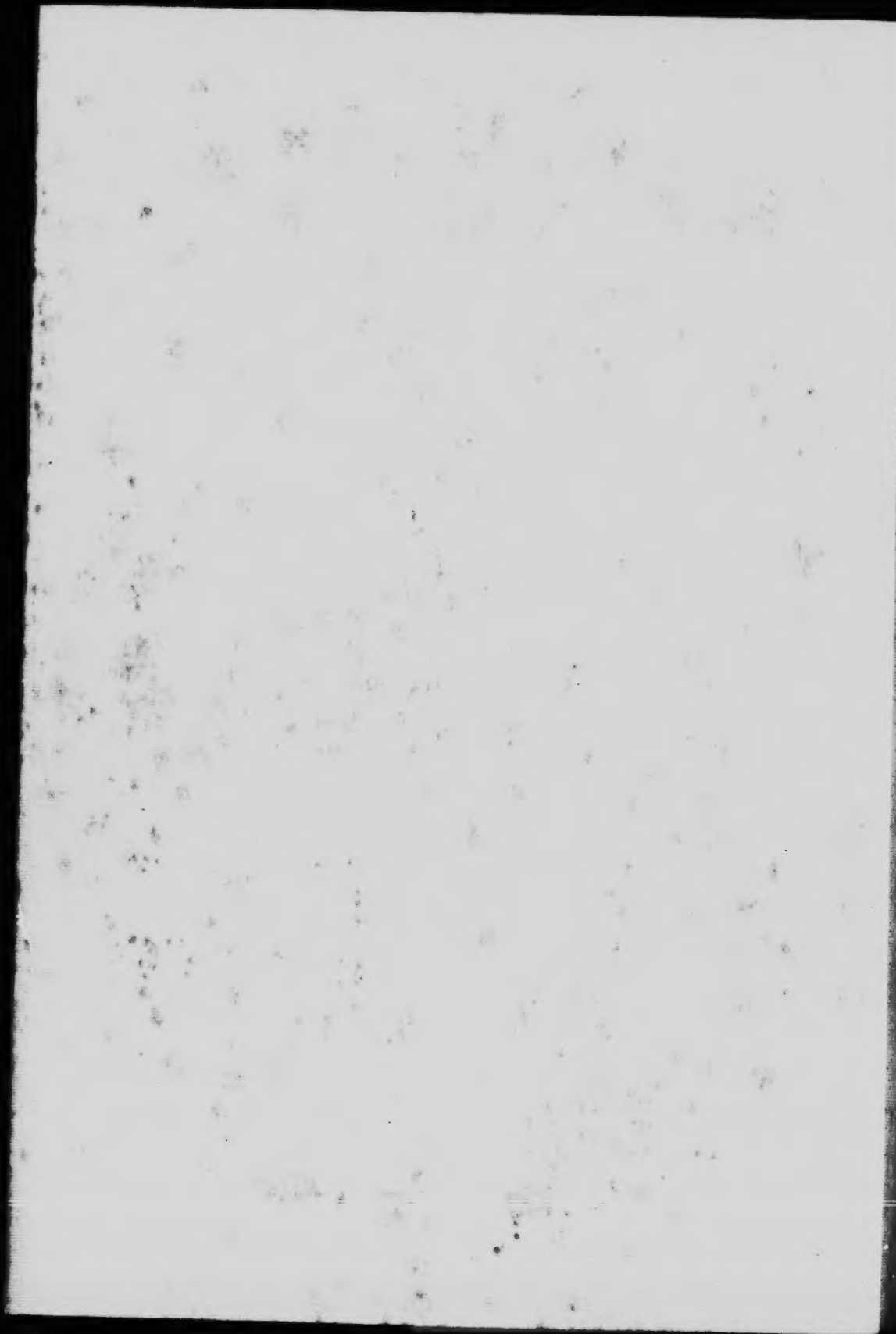
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THE CITY WITH FOUNDATIONS



THE CITY WITH FOUNDATIONS

BY

JOHN EDGAR M'FADYEN

M.A. (Glas.), B.A. (Oxon.)

*Professor of Old Testament Literature and Exegesis in Knox College, Toronto;
Author of "Old Testament Criticism and the Christian Church," "Introduction
to the Old Testament," "The Prayers of the Bible," etc.*

*He looked for the city which hath the foundations,
whose builder and maker is God.*

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TO
MY OLD COLLEGE FRIEND
REV. JAMES LAW, M.A.
IN MEMORY OF
FOUR HAPPY STUDENT YEARS

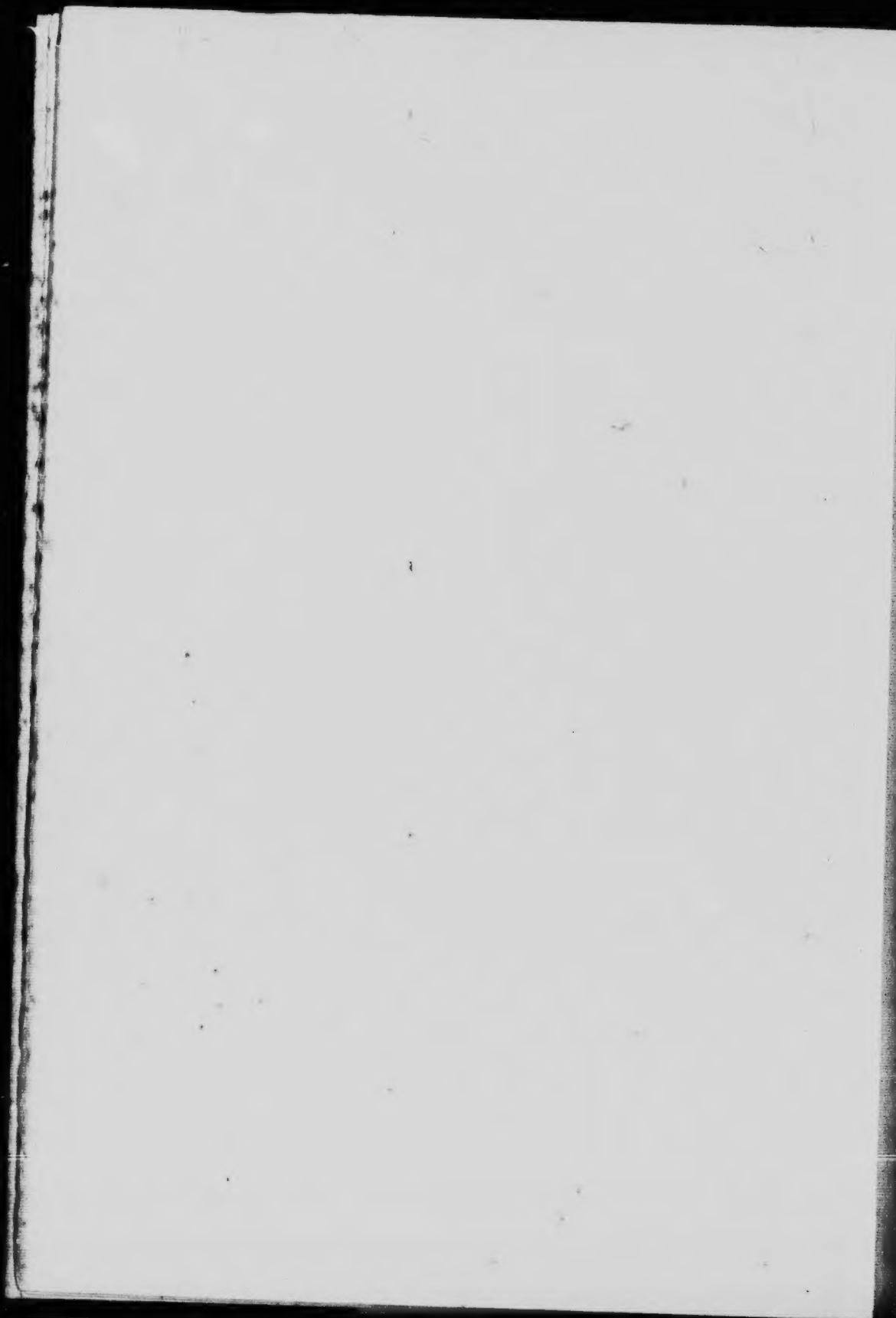
PREFACE

THE words of the Bible are inexhaustible in their freshness and power; and this volume, like its predecessors, *The Divine Pursuit* and *In the Hour of Silence*, is an attempt to capture something of their aroma. The chapters are not elaborate expositions, but simple meditations, resting usually upon a close study of the original meaning of some great Bible word or scene, and exhibiting some aspect of its permanent message. Those ancient words still speak, as no other words speak, to the men of to-day, and so, we believe, they will continue to speak to men for ever.

These chapters have already appeared in one or other of the following magazines: *The Interior*, *The Congregationalist*, *The Sunday School Times*, *The Biblical World*, *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, *The Record of Christian Work*, *The Presbyterian*. For their courteous permission to reproduce them, my thanks are most heartily tendered to the editors.

JOHN E. M'FAYDEN.

*Silver Bay,
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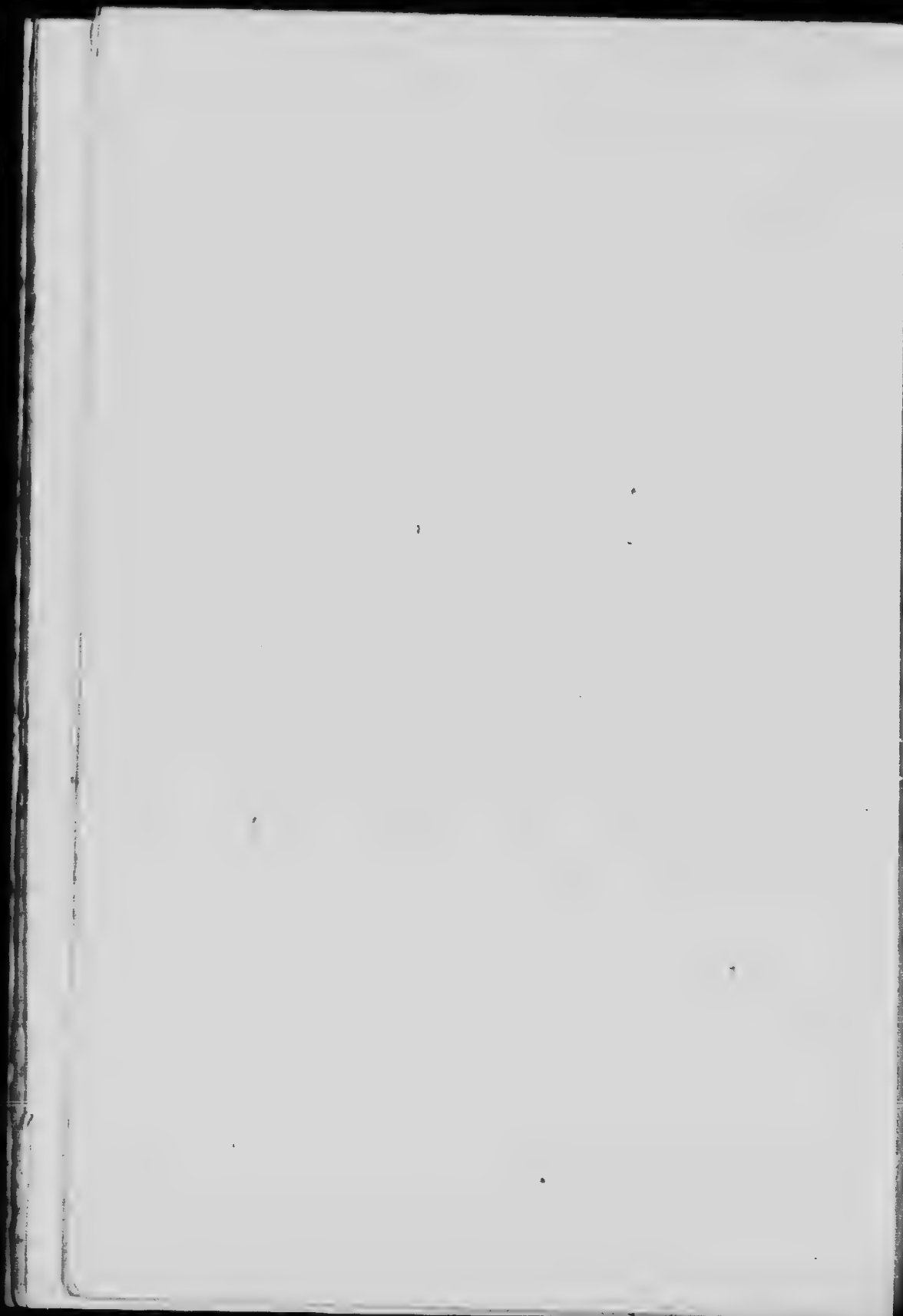
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DWELLING IN TENTS



DWELLING IN TENTS

"Dwelling in Tents, he looked for the City"

THE earliest ancestors of our faith were nomads, and the imprint of their wandering life has been left indelibly upon the Christian religion. We call ourselves pilgrims and strangers. We say that on the solid earth we are but sojourners, and that only for a little while. We learned these words from the ancient men of the desert. Every day the men who dwelt in tents were impressed with the mutability of human things. The tent could be pitched here or there or anywhere; and in all the shiftings of the desert life there was little sense of permanence or home.

In this ancestry of our religion we see the wise providence of God. For if religion gives us anything, it must give us the sense of something fixed amid the uncertainties, something stable amid the instabilities of life; and before we can appreciate the city that standeth fast, whose foundations are in the holy mountains, we must have the insecurity of all things earthly borne in upon our soul. Now the life of the early Hebrews was fitted to impress

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them with just this sense of ceaseless change amid the unchanging monotony of the desert; and this sense of the uncertainties and shiftableness of human life has been stamped for ever into the language of our religion by the wandering fathers of our faith.

Both the city and the tent have their contribution to make to religion—the city with its suggestion of social activities and obligations, the tent with its suggestion of frailty and change. The one is a prophecy of the heavenly Jerusalem where men dwell together as brethren in unity; the other is the fragile symbol of our earthly life, which oftentimes seems to have no foundation anywhere, but shifts its place with the changing days, and finally vanishes away. City and tent alike have had their place in the shaping and colouring of religious thought, and the service of the tent is not likely to be forgotten, for its image is ever before us. Here to-day and gone to-morrow; that is the message of the tent. Nothing to do but pull up the tent-pins, and the home has vanished as at the touch of a wizard's wand. There is no home in all the desert; all the desert is a home. There is no home but God.

Such were the thoughts that may often have risen in nomad hearts. Such, at any rate, is the thought which the writer of the brave epistle to the Hebrews sees in the heart of Abraham, as he wanders about

from spot to spot in the land that was not his own. It was indeed his own in the divine purpose, but it was not yet his by possession; battles must be fought and blood spilt, ere his descendants can call the land their own. So he wandered up and down with a sense of the pathos of things at the heart of him.

He had left his dear distant eastern home for this western land where he was for ever to be but a pilgrim and stranger. But in the heart of the wanderer was the solace of a better home to come—in the city which has the foundations. "By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents . . . for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God." There are some who suppose that he saw in vision some great, noble city like the Jerusalem of David or Solomon, and that some such royal capital was to be the issue and the compensation of the relatively meagre life of the tent, to which his own days were doomed. But the thought in so great a passage must be larger than that. The city which will comfort the heart that is worn with the changes and disappointments of the tent is not a city made with hands, but the city whose designer and fashioner is God.

Dwelling in tents and looking for the city—does not that describe the life of the profounder souls of every age? And into every life, however unre-

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flecting, there come times when the awful uncertainties which beset us behind and before, and which on the smoother planes of life are so easily and so conveniently forgotten, assume an almost ghastly reality. Two trains collide in the dead of night; and beautiful homes are dissolved for ever. Death makes inroads, numerous and surprising and cruel, upon our friendships. Within a few weeks, friend after friend goes away to the silent land; till we feel that the very ground is trembling beneath our feet. We are so appalled by our impotence to keep with us those whom we love, and by their impotence to remain with us, so vexed by the might of powers which we can neither control nor persuade, that we yearn in our anguish for a city with foundations. Our poor tents have no depth of earth. The tent is as unstable as the sand on which it is pitched; even on the hillside it is exposed to every wind that blows. We need a sight of the city whose foundation is the Rock of Ages.

It is a daring and beautiful thought that the patriarch should look for a city. The author of this epistle, like Isaiah and every true prophet, is very bold; for the cities with which he was familiar were anything but divine. What was Jerusalem? The holy city in name, but not in deed or truth. It was the city that had slain the prophets and crucified the greatest Prophet of all. Of Rome he must have known at least by hearsay. And what

was Rome? To its unspeakable corruption there is a melancholy unanimity of testimony; we know it from Juvenal, from Paul, from poets and historians only too many. And what was Athens, mother of arts and eloquence? Her educated men received the earnest message of the greatest preacher of that age, or perhaps of any age, with mingled curiosity and scorn. Alexandria, Ephesus, everywhere it was the same. One would hardly have been surprised to find the author of the epistle rejecting the city as a godless thing, and finding his ideal in the ancient, simple life of the tent. But it is not so. The home of his heart is the city—the city of God.

The city and the tent offer many points of contrast; as, for example, between the life of the one and the loneliness of the other. But the particular contrast in the writer's mind at this point is that between the permanence of the one and the impermanence of the other. The city has foundations, the tent has none. The writers of the Bible were haunted by the insecurities of life; they knew themselves to be but pilgrims and strangers, and their life to be but as a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. But they lifted up their hearts in the thought of the security of the city of God.

With much emphasis and beauty John dwells upon the fact that that city has twelve foundations.

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It was for foundations that they longed, and they found them in the city whose builder and maker is God. Every earthly friendship is sundered some day. Sooner or later every fabric raised by earthly hands will totter. But—

*"They stand, those halls of Zion,
All jubilant with song."*

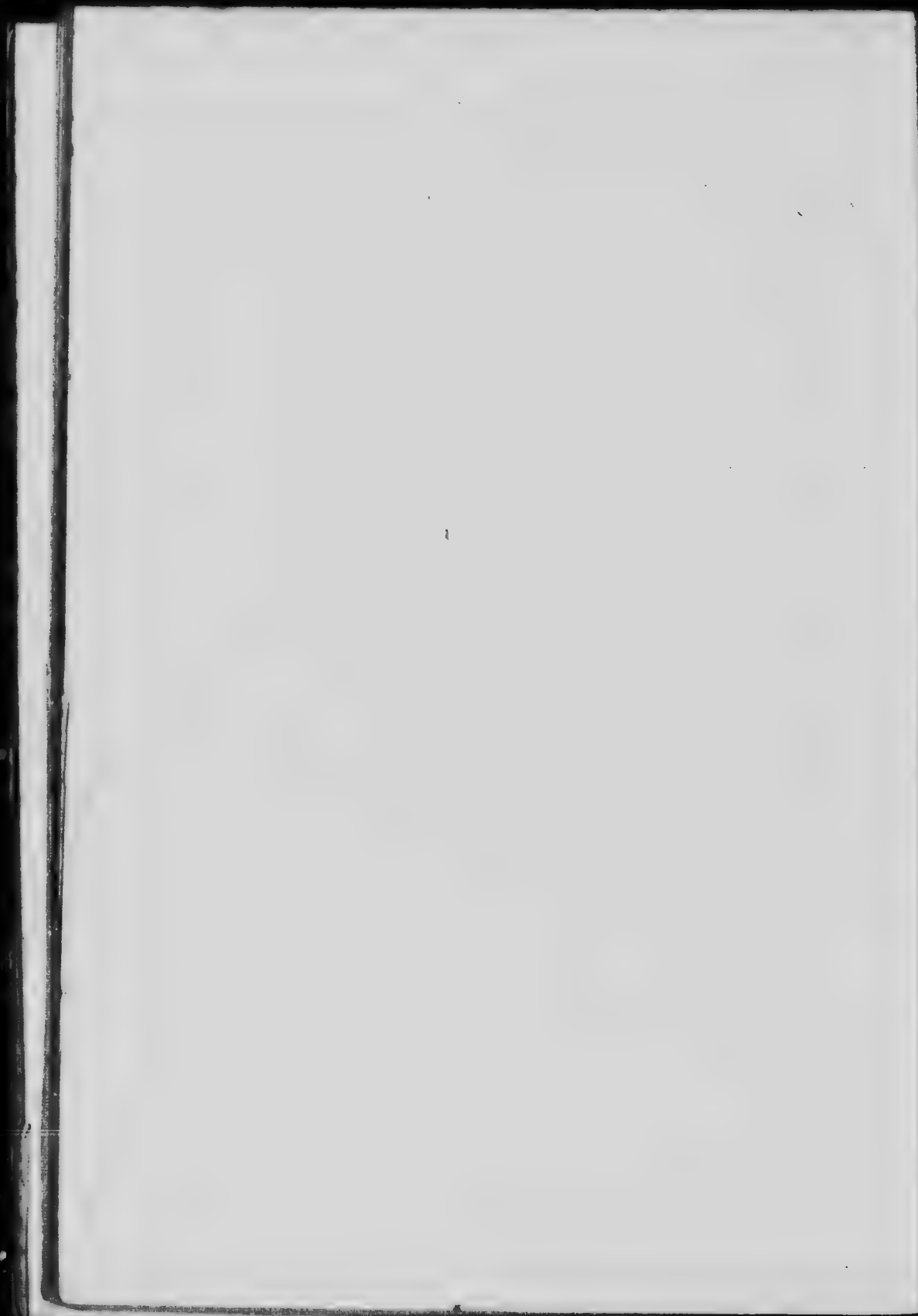
The thought here is a mystic one. It was by faith that Abraham saw the city, and the city which he saw was in the world beyond. That is the vision which can make any man feel secure amid the insecurities. In that he can take refuge when the earth seems to reel, and a sense of homelessness gathers about his heart. His citizenship is in heaven, and nothing can rob him of the portion that is laid up for him in the new Jerusalem, the city of the living God that stands fast for ever.

But elsewhere we are reminded—and do we not need the reminder?—that the holy city is in our world, as well as in the world beyond, that it is a city built upon both sides of death, and that it "*comes down from God out of heaven.*" "Behold," says the apostle who saw it and described it, almost in the words of older oracles—"behold, the tent of God is with men, and He shall have His tent with them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." No wonder he says, Behold. For what a vision is this! We seem to be back in the age of tents

again. But when God pitches His tent where men pitch theirs, the very desert shall rejoice and blossom, and men will call it home.

The clustering tents of that great multitude which no man can number, with the tent of God in the midst, what will it be but in very truth a city of God? And is not the vision in part already fact? God has come down and dwelt among us, and men have beheld His glory, and some are this day reflecting that glory and being transformed into the same image. The city of God is coming down from heaven. It is with us. Every day its walls are rising—in service faithfully rendered, in the will of God willingly done. The city of God is both a vision and a fact, a hope and a present reality. It has been the dream and the consolation of all who have felt the evanescence of mortal things.

But it is more than a dream. To take part in the building of that city is the duty and joy of every one who believes in it. The heroes of Hebrew history, whose faith is immortalized in the brilliant summary of this eleventh chapter, played their part well. We shall play ours by working in the inspiration of their example. Compassed about by that great cloud of witnesses, let *us too* run with patience the race that is set before *us*. Then even here we shall have a foretaste of citizenship in that city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.



ONE NEEDFUL THING

ONE NEEDFUL THING

"One thing is needful"

It is pleasant to find Jesus anywhere, but most of all in the house of His friends; and there is no more gracious scene in all the gospels than that in which our Lord, doubtless footsore and hungry, was welcomed by Martha to her hospitable home. For it is Martha who welcomes Him; in all that pertains to the household Mary plays a humbler rôle. Through all this scene her voice is not once heard. She is not so much Mary as Martha's sister; and the first and only glimpse we have of her is sitting at the feet of Jesus, and listening to His word. She had taken her place there deliberately, as the words imply. She knew what she was doing. She had chosen the good part, as her Master said. Martha thought she was selfish and indolent; but Mary sat down at the feet of the Lord whom she loved, sure that He at least would not misunderstand her. She knew that the words of Jesus were very precious, and she could not be sure that He would ever be back again.

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Martha loved Jesus too, but she showed her love in another way. She was bent, like a good housewife, on doing her utmost for the great Guest, whose real greatness she only half understood. She wished to entertain Him worthily, and to her that meant elaborately; she forgot how simple His tastes were, and how that His meat and drink were to do the will of His Father in heaven. So she was "distracted"—to use the evangelist's expressive word—"pulled about," with much serving; and with a blunt impulsiveness which reminds us of Peter, she went to the spot where Jesus and Mary were—in another room, perhaps, for she complains that Mary had left her—and, carried away by her feelings, she addressed the Master in irritable and almost impertinent words: "Is it nothing to Thee that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone?" Surely she must have known Jesus very well, to speak to Him thus boldly. He was doubtless a familiar figure in that home—so familiar that the mistress had lost her awe of Him, if ever she had any, and could address Him even in imperious tones. "Tell my sister," she impetuously says, "to lend me a hand."

What will the Master say? for this is a great moment, which will put His resources to the test. The situation is one of extreme delicacy. Both the women love Him. Both are honouring Him, though in widely different ways. He will be just

to both, to Martha no less than to Mary. He looks upon the heart. He knows the affection that beats beneath the sharp, rude words; and He will deal with her very tenderly. But, in spite of her affection, she lacks one thing yet. A loving soul has gone astray, and Jesus must bring her gently back. "Martha, Martha." It is not for nothing that Jesus names her twice. The deep and earnest emotion that breathes through the twice-repeated name shows how much the incident had moved Him, and how important is the word He is now about to utter. "Thou art anxious." He touched the spot with unerring instinct.

"He struck His finger on the place,
And said: 'Thou ailest here.'"

Martha's soul was not calm. There was inner and outer unrest. The bustling about the house was but the counterpart of a certain unsteadiness within. "Thou art anxious and troubled about many things." Jesus must have been touched by Martha's eager activity about the many things; for were they not all in His honour? All the same, it was a mistake, due to a misunderstanding of the nature of Jesus, and of the real needs of men. Hospitality, in its kindly, stumbling way, was trying to express itself in the "many things," under the idea that the sincerity of the welcome could best be measured by the number of the dishes on the table. But it is not so. The many things are not needful.

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"Only a few things," says Jesus, "are necessary"—and then, after a pause—"or rather only one."

Was ever transition from the material to the spiritual sphere more delicately mediated than by this great word of Jesus? One moment we are at Martha's table; the next, we are in the spiritual world. A less elaborate dinner would do, Jesus seems to say; only a few things are needful at the table, and a few in life; or rather in life there is only one thing that is really needful. With one swift, sure stroke He smote down into the eternal significance of this pathetic little scene; and in words that are a marvel of kindness as well as of solemnity, He brought home to a soul distracted by the "many things" the need of unifying and simplifying her life. Many things we may have, but one thing we must have, if life is to be life. Many things are useful, many are important; but one is necessary, absolutely necessary. Mary had chosen it; and we are almost given to understand—though Jesus gently refrains from saying so—that Martha had not. While Martha was preparing one meal, Mary was enjoying another; for the "portion" of which Jesus speaks is the word used elsewhere for the share of a meal. Two banquets were preparing in that house; and Mary was already sitting at the table of her Lord in the heavenly world, partaking, at His gracious hand, of that bread of which he who takes shall never hunger

again. This portion could never be taken away from her.

One's sympathies run out to Martha. It is easy, we say, to honour the Lord by sitting at His feet; it is a harder thing by far to honour Him by active service. And yet in many points we must come to feel that Martha was mistaken. She does not well understand either Mary or Jesus. Her appreciation of Jesus is genuine but not profound; and she does not speak to Him with the deference which is His due. She may have been almost hurt by His assurance that Mary had chosen the good part; she thought in her heart that Mary had chosen the bad, or, at any rate, the selfish part. There was only one way, she thought, of honouring her Lord at that moment, and she herself had chosen it.

Now there is no direct rebuke in the words of Jesus; He who promised an inheritance in His Father's kingdom to those who fed the hungry could not have been angry with the woman who welcomed Him with so unmistakable a hospitality. The only rebuke—and it is graciously indirect—touches her censoriousness in seeming to imply that Mary had not done well. But Martha has to learn that she does not herself exhaust the possibilities of service, and that there may be forms of service which she despises—forms, too, perhaps, superior to her own. The more we look at this very human hostess, with her restlessness, her

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anxiety, her impulsiveness, her irritability, her intolerance, the more we sympathize with the kindly remonstrance that lies beneath the searching words of Jesus. But it must not be forgotten that He does not directly condemn Martha. His whole bearing to her is one of inexpressible tenderness. He must lead her to see that there is a place, and a high one, for such as Mary; but He does not deny that she, too, has her place. The contrast between Martha and Mary is a contrast within the kingdom itself. Real enough it is, but not like that tragic contrast between those within and those without. Martha and Mary are sisters, and their virtues are sister virtues—Martha, the symbol of strenuous energy; Mary, the pattern of sweet contemplation. In the kingdom of God there is a place for both; for the unwearied activities of Protestantism, and for that gracious and unobtrusive devotion which has so often marked Catholicism. After all, it is not so much the "many things" that are at fault, for all things are God's; it is the being "anxious and troubled" about them.

Martha is anxious. Mary is not anxious. She is calm. She can rest. The practical person may have little use for Mary. She may seem to him to be a simpleton or a sluggard. Yet the contemplative Mary was more practical than her practical sister after all. She knew how to seize the golden opportunity which came to her with the visit of

Jesus; and she had the wisdom to gather, in this quiet hour, strength for the lonely days to come, when the Master would sup with them no more.

One thing is needful. What is that? It is very characteristic of Jesus that He does not say. To the interpretation of His great words we must go forth with our minds, our imaginations, and our hearts. He does not always tell us plainly what we should so much wish to know. He does not tell us, but He shows us. One thing is needful. Look at Mary, and you will see it. There it is! or rather, there she is! for Mary is that thing incarnate. Sitting at the Master's feet, and hanging wistfully upon His every word, she is an immortal illustration of the truth which Jesus would bring home to the restless Martha, and to all those eager, strenuous spirits of which Martha is the type.

In one of its phases, the one thing needful is the power to sit down. To some, every hour is lost which is not crowded with action. Meals must be prepared, and business transacted; if there is no well-spread table to show, no achievement to record, the time has been spent in vain. God can only be served by busy hands and nimble feet. But aspiration is as necessary as action, and is the condition of the noblest action. True, we test our souls in the hour of labour and conflict; but we win them in the quiet hour, communing with our own hearts, or with those who are wiser than we; and the wisest

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of all is Jesus. Many a man has been ruined because he could not do this, because he did not know how to be happy within the four walls of his room.

In another of its aspects, the one thing needful is to hear the words of Jesus; for it was to hear those words that Mary exposed herself to the misunderstanding of her sister, by sitting at the Master's feet. Many words are wise and fruitful, but there are none like His. None see so deep into life, or so far across death; and the soul that does not steady itself on His words is likely enough to be anxious and troubled about many things. But to sit down in a quiet hour when the mood comes upon us—for this mood is the visit of Jesus—to read and ponder His words till we learn from them that peace which passeth all understanding, and which will keep us from being anxious and troubled any more: that is the one thing needful.

THE STARS ALSO

THE STARS ALSO

"He made the stars also"

THE writer of the great prose poem with which the Bible opens, after sketching, in majestically simple outlines, the creation of the world with its wonder of green, then turns our eyes to the heavens, with the great lights which God set there to light the world. "God made the two great lights," he tells us; "the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night"; and then he adds, almost as if by an afterthought, "He made the stars also."

Many a soul is thankful that He did not forget the stars. It is easy to believe that the greater lights were hung in the firmament by the fingers of God; but it is a solace to remember that He made the stars also. The splendid sun and the gentle moon—they are not more truly His than the stars, which are so many that they cannot be counted for multitude. It is, perhaps, not too much to see in this allusion to the stars a touch of that tender regard which the Bible shows everywhere for the small and

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the weak things, and the things which seem to be of no account. In the lordly sun which rules the day, rejoicing like a hero as he runs across the sky, and in the gracious moon which gently rules the night, the Bible does not forget the little twinkling stars; for they too are God's. "He made the stars also."

Whatever may be true of other parts of the universe, for our world at least there is but one sun and one moon; but there is a multitude of stars. And this is as true of the earth as of the heavens. The very brilliant men are always and necessarily few; and if it be our lot ever to have stood near such, and to have marvelled at the brightness of their shining,—a brightness which we know can never be ours,—we may have been tempted to regret or even despise the feeble flicker of our own light. The light that is in us may not indeed be altogether darkness, but it is to theirs as starlight unto sunlight; and we may have wondered whether it would not be but common wisdom to cover it up altogether.

This mood is not an unhealthy one, at least not wholly so. It is sure to come at times upon the man who measures himself, with a spirit purged of jealousy, against his more brilliant and able brethren. The man of balanced judgment who sees truly and steadily, will often enough have to confess the relative futility of the finest of his own achievements. But when such a mood steals over

him, it is well for him to remember that God made the stars also. Such light as he has is a gift of God, set in the firmament of some heaven to shine as brightly as it may. It is no disgrace to the star that it does not shine as the noonday sun. The star must be content to shine as a star. Every man is not called to illuminate a world. If we cannot be brilliant men, we can at least be ourselves; and it is our duty to exercise any gift that is in us, without impairing it by foolish and fruitless comparisons of our work with that of our more highly favoured brethren; for more will be required of him to whom more is given.

There cannot be too much humility; but that which humbles the man ought at the same time to inspire and exalt him. His service, measured against the exacting demands of his own higher nature, against the high laws of God, or even against the service of some of his more gifted fellow-men, may well seem so poor as to be hardly worth while. But when it becomes the clear conviction of his soul that God made him,—not only made the men who in the various spheres of human activity are as burning and shining lights, but made him also,—he puts bravely away from him the paralyzing sense of his own insignificance, and proceeds with a happy heart to do with his might what his hands find to do.

Even in the name of the Christian gospel, a pro-

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test must be lifted up against the self-depreciation which cripples a man's power of serving the world. Those who believe that they are sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ, and who count themselves, in some real sense, to be fellow-workers with God and brethren with Jesus Christ, are bound in honour to act up to the dignity of the name with which they are named. On the conscience of every one who believes that he has been bought with a price, ought to lie the solemn obligation to assert in some vital way that individuality which has been blessed and redeemed.

Sometimes, too, it does us good to remember that we are not infallible judges of the ultimate worth either of our own work or of any other man's. We think the stars are tiny because they are so far away; we count them insignificant because they do not shed much light upon our world. But if we could traverse the millions of miles that separate us from them, and see them as they are, we should find how foolishly inadequate had been our notion of their size and brilliance, of the work they do and the place they fill in the economy of the universe. And may it not be so too with the seemingly feeble lights of humanity? Nay, what are even the most brilliant lights when seen in the burning light of God? Men do not differ so much as we think. All are under one condemnation, and all are destined to a common oblivion.

We pass ; the path that each man trod
Is dim, or will be dim, with weeds :
What fame is left for human deeds
In endless age? It rests with God."

No man is altogether destitute of light ; for the true light, we are told, lighteth every man that cometh into the world. The light that is in most of us is indeed only starlight ; but what then ? The moon and the stars were set in the firmament to rule by night. The language here is that of an ancient world that had once looked upon the stars as divine beings which did, in very truth, rule over the night ; and though that view was not shared by the writer of Genesis any more than by ourselves, it is not without its element of truth. There must be order in the firmament, and the dark night has to be ruled. It is when the night is about us that the stars are welcome. It is then that we need them, and it is only then that they can help us. There was more than humour in the quaint remark of an earnest Christian worker, that the stars were more important than the sun ; for the sun shone, he said, when it was light, but the stars shone in the dark, when they were needed.

The night about us is always dark enough, and any glimmer of a star is sure to be a welcome sight to somebody. Too often is the situation in church and city and state like that of the ship described by Luke, when "neither sun nor stars shone upon us for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, and

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all hope that we should be saved was now taken away." We have never more light than we need. Wherever our lot may be cast, there is darkness enough of mind and heart in the sphere about us, which any light that is in us was divinely intended to dispel. It was Jesus who said, "Let your light shine." That is all that a light can be expected to do. The greater lights can do no more; the lesser lights should do no less.

Are we then shining ones? If indeed the true light lighteth every man, there must be at least some glimmer within me, even me, of that divine light whose unspeakable glory no man can approach unto. There must be in me some little gleam, unless, indeed—and this is sadly possible—I have deliberately quenched it. Am I allowing such light as I have to shine, or am I contributing nothing to illumine the thick darkness of that world which I touch most closely? It is not given to all, or even to many, to move large numbers of their fellow-men by persuasive pen or by eloquent tongue; nor is it given to many to penetrate the hidden things of nature, or seriously to affect the course of history. But none the less, the call of Jesus is to all, "Let your light shine." Be it brilliant or feeble, its duty is to shine.

Do you know of any whose minds are dwelling in the darkness of ignorance, strangers to the uplifting thoughts that are imprisoned by the score in the books upon your bookshelves—thoughts lying

there like sleeping giants, ready to go out and do battle for the deluded and the ignorant the moment they are wakened and set free? The gift or the loan of such a book would be to the mind that is darkened by ignorance as the rising of the morning star. It may not seem much to us, but it may be everything to him. Hamerton has truly said that "it is with our intellectual as with our material wealth; we do not realize how precious some fragments of it might be to our poorer neighbours."

Even if we have no books to lend, nor any ideas to impart, there are other and even better ways in which we may be as a light shining in a dark place. About us there are hearts that are gloomy or sullen or sad, hearts that are losing faith in God because they see so few gleams of the divine in those who call themselves His children. That darkness can sometimes be dispelled by the quiet light of a simple goodness that shines steadily from day to day. It is not the light of genius, but the nobler light of goodness. It is unaffected and unobtrusive, but it is as a benediction of God to all upon whom it falls. The gentle faces of some whom we know have weaned the murmurer from his murmuring; they have brought their own sweet peace to hearts that were rebellious. They have made us believe in the beauty of goodness. And they shall shine at the right hand of God, when the stars are forgotten.

THE SAVIOUR AND THE MANIAC

THE SAVIOUR AND THE MANIAC

"He besought Jesus that he might be with Him"

OF all the encounters of Jesus with men, surely none is more striking than His meeting with the maniac whose home was among the tombs. Jesus had just left the boat, and stepped upon the shore, when from out one of the caves that served for a burying-place among the limestone hills there rushed towards Him a creature that seemed not so much like a human being as like an evil spirit incarnate. Perhaps the unhappy man had been watching the boat coming across the lake; and with the swift bounds of a maniac, he made straight for the Master as He disembarked. It was always so with Jesus. No sooner did He touch the land than He was met by human want and misery.

How very touching is the contrast between these two men—the Saviour and the maniac; immortal symbol of the world, wild and gloomy, hopeless and homeless, rushing on to offer its instinctive and unconscious homage to the Jesus whom it needs. There stands the Master, with His quiet, fearless bearing, with His sorrowful face and His

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beautiful eyes; and there, at His feet, is the demoniac, wild and fierce and naked, with the strength of a demon in his right arm and the awful light of madness in his eye. Not only all the day, but all the night, when other men were sleeping, the lonely hills where he made his home would ring with his unearthly cries, and he would gash himself with stones until the blood would spurt. So powerful was he that he could burst the heavy chains with which he had been bound, and so terrible was he that the bravest were afraid to pass that way.

No one would pass but Jesus. He was not afraid. Such were the ways He loved to pass. He loved to set the fallen upon their feet, to restore again the ruins of human nature; and to heal this wild misery which rushed towards Him from the hills, and then threw itself impulsively at His feet, was just to do the work which His Father had given Him to do. A brave heart might well have quailed before such an onset, and fled perhaps in terror; but Jesus stood and, looking upon him, loved him. We listen with bated breath to hear what He will say to this poor, unhappy and dangerous man. Jesus is always simple, serenely and sublimely simple. He does not begin by preaching any gospel, He simply asks the man his name. And we may well believe that the maniac's manner would be instantly transformed. Here was a voice which sounded as perhaps no human voice before or since has sounded

—the quiet, gentle, affectionate tone must have gone home with healing to the recesses of that shattered mind; and here were the words of One who spoke to him as a man speaks to his friend. Other men had repeatedly come to bind him with their cruel chains; who could this be who came with no chain, but who bound him all the more firmly by the gentle bonds of love?

Is it any wonder that in the quiet, authoritative presence of Jesus, the maniac is transformed? He, who before was naked, now is clothed. He, who before rushed with wild frenzy about the desolate hills, now sits quietly at the feet of Jesus. He, who before was possessed by devils, is now possessed by the spirit of Jesus.

And such were some of us. Before Jesus laid His gentle hand upon us and spoke to us the simple words that reached our hearts, we too, like the demoniac, were not only useless, but dangerous, a menace to those who met us and passed by our way. Our haunts were among the tombs and not far from the swine. But there came a day when we left the tombs and met Jesus, or rather were met by Him, upon the shore. And then it was all so different. We saw life with other eyes. We wandered no more wildly upon the hills, among the tombs and near the swine; but we sat down, with rapture in our hearts, at the feet of Jesus, and we would have wished to remain there for evermore.

But Jesus will not have that. There is a time to sit, with the demoniac, at the Master's feet, and there is a time to rise and go. The story of the Gerasene is almost more touching at the end than at the beginning. For we are told that as Jesus was going into the boat again, the man whose mind He had restored, began to entreat Him for permission to remain with Him. Nothing seemed more reasonable. What a disciple this man would have made! Every fresh exercise of self-control, every sane word he uttered, would be an irresistible reminder of the debt he owed to Jesus; and what more natural than that he should wish to be for ever beside the great Benefactor who had transformed his life?

Yet Jesus refused. As he earnestly besought Jesus to be allowed to remain by Him, "Jesus suffered him not, but said, 'Go.'" Why was he so anxious to remain, and why was Jesus so insistent that he should go? Some ancient writers suppose that the man was afraid that in the absence of Jesus the demons might return. The horrible memory of his madness may have haunted his mind, and he was afraid to leave Jesus. He knew that Jesus was stronger than the demons who had tormented him; and he would have been prepared to walk through any valley, however long and dark and peopled with evil spirits, if only there was One continually near him to whom he could say, "Thou art with

me: Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." For a moment, his heart may have sunk, as Jesus uttered His first stern word, "Go."

Why did Jesus refuse the man's request? Partly for the world's sake and partly for the man's own. "Go," said Jesus, "to thy house, to thine own people, and tell them all that the Lord, in pity, hath done for thee." The saved man has to be, in his turn, a saviour, or at least a preacher. Anything that he knows about Jesus, those who are dear to him should know too. "Go to thine own people and tell *them*." Upon the man who has been redeemed, who has passed from insanity to soundness of mind, from lonely misery to fulness of joy, lies the obligation to tell the story to those whom he can influence, first to those of his own household, and then to those beyond it; for if a man has been healed by the shores of the sea of Galilee, then Decapolis has a right to know about it too. Life upon the mountains and among the tombs is no more possible for such an one: he must go with his message among the men who need it. The new power which Jesus has brought into his life is not only for himself, but for them. Inspiration has to be translated into action, knowledge and power into service. The work for which he was redeemed will not be done if he sits at Jesus' feet. So, for the world's sake, Jesus says, "Go."

But no less for the man's sake. He has to learn

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that the power which redeemed him can keep him, whether the bodily presence of Jesus is near him or not. Perhaps, like many men, he was anxiously dependent upon a visible support to his faith; and the gracious Jesus, who loved him better than he knew, deliberately sent him away, that he might learn the true meaning of spiritual religion. "Go and tell what the Lord hath done." The Lord was the Lord of all the earth, and everywhere He might be found. When Jesus entered into His boat, and was lost to sight across the lake, the power which He represented did not vanish with Him; and Jesus wished to bring home to this redeemed but anxious soul, that the divine resources were always at the disposal of the man who trusted them—alike upon the sea and land, upon the valleys and the hills, in the crowded city and on the waste and desolate place where no man is. God and His power and His love are everywhere.

Thus it is in the loving wisdom of God that we are sometimes called by circumstances to leave the friends who have been the support of our religious life. He wishes us to stand upon our own feet and to rise to our full spiritual stature. When we beseech Him to allow us to remain, He sometimes sends us away in order that we may be our best and bravest. Religion has been made real to us by some brave, strong man, or by some sweet, pure woman; and we are too prone to identify it with them.

Near them we can believe in God; far from them we are afraid of ourselves. Life would be easier with them beside us: that is why God sends us away. An easy religion is not worth while. We must learn that when we part from those whom we love, or they from us, we do not part from God. They step into the boat, and with breaking hearts we watch them move across the lake and pass out of our sight for ever; but have we not the solace of that unseen Companion who said, "Lo! I am with you alway"?

THE TOWER OF FAITH

THE TOWER OF FAITH

"Though it tarry, wait for it"

THE sceptic and the prophet, widely as they differ, are alike at least in this, that they both honestly face facts. They are both seers; only the one sees more, the other less. The sceptic sees the facts at his feet; the prophet, while not blind to these, also sets his eyes on the far-away. The sceptic sees the confusions, and is perplexed, perhaps provoked into sarcasm; the prophet sees the order behind and beyond, and is comforted by it. He knows of the mountain behind the mist. The mist, which the sceptic sees, is a fact—as much of a fact, while it is there, as the mountain. But it is not *the* fact. The wind dissipates it; but no wind can dissipate the mountains.

Neither sceptic nor prophet would willingly "make his judgment blind." The prophet would be no prophet were he to purchase his serenity by closing his eyes to the anomalies and the tragedies which, from time immemorial, have confirmed the sceptic in his scepticism, and staggered the faith even of good men. He must gaze, sorrowfully indeed,

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yet unflinchingly, upon it all. He may see through it. He may see beyond it. But he has first of all to see it, or he can be of little service to the man whom it perplexes. This honest recognition of fact the sceptic and the prophet share in common; and so it happens that the man who begins as a sceptic may end as a prophet. He earnestly looks at the things which have made men resentful and rebellious; and the more earnestly he looks, the more surely will he learn to see not those things only, but the dawning of that larger purpose to which these things and all things contribute.

Even the greatest prophets were sometimes perplexed, and they spoke to God in words of passionate remonstrance. It was so with Habakkuk. The times in which he lived were out of joint. He looked for order, and behold! confusion. Success seemed to be on the side of the battalions. Chaldean armies, strong and terrible, were scouring Western Asia, and sweeping irresistibly into their net the weaker peoples that stood in their way. Judah is impotent. She, too, is caught and held fast, grateful if the life is not crushed out of her. As a political and religious force, she is likely to be extinguished, and Habakkuk's heart is sore. Almost in despair, he appeals to Israel's "holy and everlasting God," and asks what means such an impious triumph. Is it, after all, might and not right, that is at the heart of things?

What does the prophet do? In the tumult of his soul, he resolves to climb his tower.

"On my watch I will take my stand
And I will set me on my tower,
And I will spy out to see what He will say to me,
And what answer He will make to my complaint."

Down among the noise and confusion, he can see nothing, hear nothing—nothing at least that steadies and inspires him. He must reach a vantage point, from which he can see; he must climb his tower. For the seer must be above the crowd and the confusion. He must be, like his God, "high and lifted up." Only then can he see the meaning and perspective of the battle below, and watch its seeming confusions contribute to a larger order. So he takes his stand, he sets himself. The words imply deliberate purpose, such as that of the soldier who plants his foot firmly in the day of battle. It was not possible for him to keep his feet in the field below. The crowd was seething and shouting, lamenting and blaspheming; and he, with it, was being swayed hither and thither. Below, all is flux; but on his tower he can stand. There is the vision and the peace.

It is in no sceptical mood that the prophet climbs his tower. Watch him as he mounts with those sorrowful eyes of his kindling with another light; for he is quite sure that his God will have something to show him or tell him. "I will spy out to see

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what He will say," for say something He will. He will not leave His prophet to the gloomy doubts of his own heart. So up he goes with confidence—away, for the time, from the men whom he would help below. There will always be a certain loneliness about the true prophet. He must indeed be a man among men, one who is touched to anger, as Habakkuk was, by the oppression he sees around him, one who can read the signs of the times, and who is sensitive to every change on the social and political horizon; yet he must also know what it is to "sit above it all; alone with the stars." There must be in his life a certain detachableness. He will not see much if he is for ever rubbing shoulders with the crowd. He must sometimes be above them. He must be able to see what they cannot see, and he will not see much without a tower.

No man ever climbs and listens long and patiently in vain. "I will spy out to see what He will say . . . and Jehovah answered me and said, . . ." There is a vision for the man who will climb, and an answer for the man who knows how to wait and prepare himself for it. As the prophet went up, Jehovah came down. It is His delight to come down to show something to the man who will climb. But the man has to put himself where he can see and hear. He must give God a chance. He must rise above the crowd, and all the more, if it is his ambition to be of any use to them. Every

word heard by such a man, every vision seen from such a tower, is of permanent value. It is a message not only for the prophet, but also for those to whom he ministers. Therefore it has to be written—as Jehovah tells His prophet—written so large and plain that no one can misread or ignore it. The true prophet is not afraid to challenge the world with his message. He is ready to publish it in the market-place or proclaim it on the housetops. He will engrave it on tablets, as Habakkuk did, or give it the like permanence of the printed page, if need be; for he is neither ashamed nor afraid. Such a message deserves permanent record; for, being intended to create and steady faith, it concerns everybody. It is at once a consolation and a challenge; a consolation to those who endure in spite of appearances, a challenge to an unbelieving world. The ultimate issue is both clear and certain to a true seer. He is neither afraid to trust it nor to proclaim it.

That issue is clear, but it may be far away; and this is the burden of the prophet's message: "The vision is speeding on to the end; and if it tarry, wait for it." It is a word of patience as well as of faith. "In your patience ye shall win your souls." Once the prophet had not only hoped, but believed, that the great work for which he was looking would be wrought "in your days," that is, in the days of his own contemporaries. Some swift and marvellous

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interposition of God would come, he trusted, within that generation, to confound the unbelievers and confirm the faithful. But now his impatience has been rebuked by the vision from the tower. It has taught him that eternity is very long, and that history is not so simple a thing as he had once thought. Its forces are infinitely complex, and the sharpest eyes cannot see all that will happen "in our day." The just shall live; the right will triumph; and that is all we know. Nay, the just does live, and the right does already triumph in every such honest and steadfast soul as Habakkuk. When out of his perplexity he ascends his tower, with the quiet confidence in his heart that God will speak some word to him, the victory is already his. In the world he is above the world.

That may indeed be a solitary triumph. But every generation sees it shared by more and more; and it is only a question of time—or, shall we rather say, of eternity?—till it will be shared by a great multitude which no man can number. For that is Habakkuk's vision: the just shall live. It is right and not might that wins, and can alone win, in a world created and upheld by a God who is "holy from everlasting." How it will come and when it will come we do not know. Habakkuk did not know. No man knows. No man needs to know. But that it will come is certain. It is coming every day, most often silently and without observation,

but very, very surely. If we see no trace of the workings of God in a month, we may see it in a year; if not in a year, we may see it in a century. For all the ages are God's. It was this confidence—amid much that was so bafflingly uncertain—in the essential and ultimate triumph of good, that sustained the prophet's soul.

"The vision is yet for the appointed time,
It is speeding on to the end, and it will not deceive.
If it tarry, wait for it,
For it is sure to come, it will not be behind."

From the tower Habakkuk sees how the purposes of God stretch from the seeming confusion at his feet away into a far country. His righteousness is like the everlasting mountains, whose outlines can be seen a great way off. The vision is for the appointed time, and that time is not yet. It is in the coming days. It may be slow, but it is sure. God has fixed a time for it, and it will not be late. In the prophet's words, "It will not come up *afterwards*." It knows its time, and if without haste, yet also without rest, it is moving on to the end. Every century, every year, brings it a little nearer. But do not lose faith or patience, if it does not come "in your day." The times are in the hand of God. "Wait for it, *for it is sure to come*, it will not lag behind." Upon his tower, the prophet has learnt something of that patience which is born of seeing things in the light of the eternal purpose. He

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began his career with impatience. He quarrelled with the ways of God. He asked, How long? and why? But that word passes when he climbs his watch-tower and looks out with grateful awe upon that mysterious but beneficent purpose which runs through all the ages.

Do men not fret themselves to-day just as Habakkuk did, and with perhaps less than his excuse? The Chaldeans are vexing us; and we hope and pray that God will hasten His work and bring some notable thing to pass in our day. There are some who are even ready to proclaim the day when it will come, and the form which it will take. There are others who, in their pathetic impatience, would precipitate some other aspect of the divine purpose—the coming of Christ, it may be, or the end of the world. Now all these things are in the hand of God. Our part is not to dogmatize or prophesy; it is to trust that wisdom which we confess to be infinitely above our own, and, in that trust, to work earnestly and wait patiently. God is from everlasting to everlasting. His purpose is not exhausted within the span of our little lives. It will be after us, as it was before us. It has eternity for its accomplishment, and if it tarry, wait for it, for it is sure to come, it will not be behind. It may indeed lag behind our hopes, and even behind our prayers; but the omnipotent wisdom of God will see that it is in time. We are fretful, because we are creatures of a day; God is patient, because He is eternal.

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

"Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

BRILLIANCE and heroism are not always united, but they are in the romantic figure of Esther. Her story glows with all the colour and passion of the East; it reads more like romance than history. Yet the brilliance of the colouring must not blind us to the skill and truth with which the figures of the book are drawn; and of them all, none is so drawn to the life as the lovely heroine herself.

By seeming accident she had been lifted from obscurity to the throne; and there, amid the security and splendour of the court, she learns one day that the life of her people is in deadly peril, and she alone can save them. Mordecai sought to lay it upon her conscience that she must go to the king and make supplication to him for the forfeited lives of her kinsmen. But then, as so often, duty was dangerous, and Esther shrank from the perilous task. "Every one knows," she says, "that the man or woman who comes before the king unbidden shall be put to death, unless the king hold out the

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golden sceptre." The effort to help her people by appearing before the king might end in destroying both herself and them; and, at first, the beautiful queen would not take the risk. Then Mordecai, not to be baffled, appealed to the heroic in her. Her unique position gave her a unique opportunity; let her rise to it bravely. "Who knows whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

These words instantly lit the whole career of Esther with a new and solemn meaning. It was, then, not for nothing that she was queen, and it was not an accident that had set her upon the throne. This was the crisis to which, throughout the brilliant, happy years, she had all unconsciously been borne; and now she was to prove to the world whether she was a queen in name only or also in deed and truth. The honour of queen she had enjoyed; the higher honour of the heroine she had yet to achieve. The appeal of Mordecai flashed a light upon her destiny. In a moment she saw the drift of the past, the meaning of the present, the vastness of the opportunity; and she swiftly made up her mind. "I will go," she said. "Let all the Jews fast for me; and, though it is against the law, I will appear before the king; and if I perish, I perish."

How different life might have been, if only, in its critical moments, we had had some true friend

to whisper into our ears, "Who knows whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" or, failing this, if we could have spoken the words to our own hearts. There are some of us whose earlier years have been an uninterrupted accumulation of happy and useful experience. The years have been gliding smoothly along. Little by little we have been adding to our resources—of knowledge or money, accomplishment or influence. We are happy in the consciousness of power, and, for long, nothing occurs to open our eyes to its obligations. And then one day we are brought face to face with a crisis. A worthy cause needs us, and we know we can help it. If we refuse, the cause may not indeed be lost, but it will certainly suffer—at least to the extent to which we could have helped it. We know this, but we are afraid. We fear the frown of the king or the people, we fear to imperil our comfort or happiness, and we will not take the risk. We love, like Esther, the seat of power; and we are too foolish to see that power is useless until it is used, too cowardly to take our life in our hands and face the king. But, oh! the thrill of satisfaction when the call finds us willing, as well as ready; when in a moment the whole meaning of our past rushes upon us, and with high hearts we go on to meet the crisis for which through the patient years Providence has been preparing us.

"Thou art come to the kingdom for such a time

as this." It is to those who are kings among men—those who are head and shoulders above the people, those whose gifts or resources make them conspicuous among their fellows—that this reminder comes especially home. It may be, for example, that a great cause is in danger. Its advocates and its opponents are pretty evenly balanced. But there is one strong man, who, if he would speak, could turn the fortunes of the day; for men believe in his sincerity and disinterestedness, as well as in his knowledge and insight, and the humbler supporters of the cause are waiting, in hope, to hear what he will say. His gifts, his influence, his experience, not only qualify but entitle him to speak a great word. But he sits in silence, or makes a speech of unworthy compromise. He lets the golden opportunity pass; and it may be that a great injustice is done, or the cause of truth and progress retarded for years, for want of the word which he could well have spoken.

There are doubtless many reasons for silence. Sometimes it is due to real and all but unconquerable diffidence, sometimes to cynicism, but sometimes also assuredly to cowardice. The man may suppose that plain, uncompromising speech might alienate his friends, imperil his influence, or injure his reputation. In any case, the day on which a strong and influential man fails, for such a reason, to lift up his voice for the truth, is one of the tragic

days of his life. In the providence of God, that was the crisis for which he had come to his kingdom, and he should have bravely met it.

Or perhaps a good cause is languishing for lack of money. Hospitals have to be built, homes for consumptives, refuges for the unfortunate. Educational institutions have to be endowed and chairs founded for research into the mysteries above, around, and beneath us. The Church desires to take the healing words of Jesus Christ to the thousands of people who stand without her pale, to the remote parts of the land where the people are unvisited by her ministers, and to the distant isles of the sea. All this needs money. And where is the money to come from? Who shall say that there is not a hundred times more than enough? Many wealthy men have done very nobly, as numerous philanthropic, educational, and religious institutions have good reason to know. But why should any such institution languish for one moment in a society so wealthy as ours? There are men who could build a hospital, or found a chair, or support a foreign missionary all his days, without having to deprive themselves of any of the luxuries, to say nothing of the necessities of their existence. Why then are these things not done on a far more generous and extensive scale? Is it not because wealth does not always rise to a sense of its obligation? A man on a throne must show himself

kingly; but when calls come from such needy and noble institutions, the men who have the money sometimes forget that they have come to their kingdom for just such a time as this.

But perhaps there is no sphere which affords so strong or subtle a temptation to forget the obligation of high privilege as that of education. It is not common to find a man's intellectual resources or a woman's accomplishments in art or music accompanied by a high sense of responsibility. It has happened, for example, that after a brilliant university course, which gave every assurance of a happy and influential career at home, the call has come to a man to spend his gifts upon some distant, needy field in India or China in the service of education or religion. The natural man may at first resent the call. Every unconsecrated instinct rises up in regret, and perhaps rebellion. In such a mood, the words of Mordecai come like a voice from heaven. Has not the cultured man come to his kingdom for just such a time as this? It is the barren fields and the forlorn causes that need the strongest men. The real kingdom has to be achieved through service. The other is but the semblance of power, this is its substance; and a day of undreamt-of gladness, as well as usefulness, dawns when the man gratefully welcomes this crisis as one of God's best gifts to him. Now he has his chance to be a king indeed.

But we must not put away this warning with the thought that it is not for us. We are not indeed kings or queens. We have no kingdom or throne. We have no commanding gifts of influence or money or culture. No! But, after all, gifts are relative. There are great kingdoms and little kingdoms, and the one are as real as the other. I have not come into another man's kingdom. I have only come into my own. But it is my own; and for my use of it and for my conduct in it, I am altogether responsible. I have not much influence, or money, or culture, but I have some; and with that I am bound, as much as the great leaders of men are bound, to face without flinching whatever crisis comes to me. Above all, if my gifts are few, I have at least my personality. That is mine, inalienably mine—a kingdom in which my authority is supreme and unchallengeable. When duty looks at me with her stern but pleading eyes, let me never forget that I am come to my kingdom for such a time as this. There is no one in the universe who has just the opportunity which I have, no one else whose situation is just the same as mine. No one else can be brave for me. If I let this opportunity slip, it is gone for ever. My negligence may bring disaster or defeat upon some worthy cause. My cowardice may involve my own life in irreparable ruin.

Nor must we let ourselves believe that our lives

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move among situations so hopelessly commonplace that there is in them no opportunity for the heroic. Never was there a greater mistake. The crisis is sure to come, though it may come in so humble a guise that we may fail to recognize it till it is gone. It may be simply the recording of a vote where important issues are at stake, it may be the speaking of a kind word to some heart in doubt or sorrow, it may be the rebuking of a blasphemous or filthy story. In the face of opportunities like these, whatever gifts of influence or character we have must be bravely used. Who knows whether thou art not come to thy kingdom for such a time as this?

Often, too, we shall find that the peril, when we face it, is not so deadly as it seemed. "And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight; and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand." Virtue is indeed its own best reward, but it is also not seldom crowned with the reward of success. Even if we fail we shall win our own souls; but as a rule, we shall not fail. Like Esther, we may save both ourselves and others. It is our imagination of the peril that unmans us; the resolution to face it brings the requisite strength, and often, too, the victory. We quail at the thought of the king upon his throne; but lo! when with brave, though beating hearts, we appear before him, he holds out to us the golden sceptre.

THE PASSING OF OPPORTUNITY



THE PASSING OF OPPORTUNITY

"Me ye have not always "

JESUS is a continual surprise. You could never guess, if you did not know, how He will reply to a disputant, or what He will do in a dilemma. He always does the original thing, says the unexpected thing. His deeds and words are a source of astonishment even to the disciples who know and love Him best. Those whom they rebuke, He welcomes; and on those with whom they are indignant, He bestows the loftiest and most deliberate commendation. Verily His ways are not as their ways, and perhaps still less as our ways.

No one could be long with Jesus without learning that He loved the poor; and it is hardly surprising that when a woman, in the wealth of her devotion, broke a box of very precious ointment and poured it over the head of her Lord, the disciples were indignant and harsh. They counted her act one of foolish extravagance and condemned it in words which we might almost imagine were the Master's own. "What is the good of such waste?" they say; "for this ointment might have been sold and

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given to the poor." It would not have been hard to believe that these were words of Jesus' own—words of mild rebuke to the eager woman who had forgotten how dear the poor were to Jesus. But no! The surprise is here as everywhere. What Jesus said was very different: "Leave her alone; it is a beautiful work that she has wrought upon Me. For ye have the poor with you all the time, but Me ye have not always." Jesus has not forgotten His love for the poor, nor has He forgotten how much might be done with the money; but the poor might be helped at any time, while if He was to be thus honoured, it must be now or never. There is a time to sell the precious ointment, and a time to break the box and pour its treasure over the head of Jesus; and happy is he who knows these times and seasons.

Jesus is here enunciating, in His own inimitable way, the great truth of the relative value of opportunities. The good is not the best; and His words suggest that the man who would do homage to the best must be daring enough to rise above the temptation to be merely good, or to govern his life by the standards even of a noble convention. Jesus came not to be ministered unto, yet He was glad, very glad, when such spontaneous ministrations came. Though meek and lowly, He unhesitatingly accepted the costliest service, and counted Himself worthy of the noblest that men could offer. He

loved the poor, but to Him life had other than economic aspects; and amid the cruelty, suspicion and misunderstanding that clouded the last of His earthly days, He welcomed with peculiar joy the daring generosity of this woman's heart.

The great words in which Jesus justified the breaking of the alabaster box in His own behalf, embody a principle which should run through all wise life. The words were these: "The poor ye have always with you; but Me ye have not always." The principle is this—that opportunities differ in value and importance, and that wisdom consists in reading their value aright and in selecting the one which will not be always with us. Certain things may be done at any time; certain other things must be done now or never. Certain privileges may be enjoyed at any time; certain others, now or never. Every life is confronted at many points with this strange contrast—between the ordinary opportunities which come with every day, and some great opportunity which, if not grasped at once, may vanish for ever. The poor and Jesus! There is the living contrast which is symbolical of so much in our life. The presence of the poor we can depend on; the pathetic commonplace is ever about us; but unique opportunities are not always with us. They are rare. Sometimes they come to us but once; and though we should wait for a century, they would never come again.

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It is very like Jesus that the opportunity which He here commends the woman for using is an opportunity for doing good. In breaking the box of ointment she was taking this unique opportunity of honouring Jesus. But the principle is as true when its application is widened to opportunities for receiving good. For here, too, some opportunities are relatively commonplace; others, like Jesus, are unique. Some are always with us, others come but once or seldom.

Every life, however humble, has unique opportunities of its own. The Sabbath day—do we use it for the better things? The holiday—do we let it bring us nearer the God of the mountains and the sea? The rare opportunities of travel—what do we do with them? Are we of those who would rather read a newspaper than watch a brilliant sunset? Common days and common sights will come again; but to him that hath ears to hear, every unique opportunity rings out the reminder, "The poor ye have always with you, but Me ye have not always." And if we cannot distinguish between opportunities, we have yet much to learn from Jesus.

In its primary reference, this word of Jesus referred not to getting, but to doing good; and here, as there, opportunities differ. It is not always easy, of course, to judge the real significance of an opportunity. A whole career has often been determined by a choice which at the moment seemed trivial.

At the same time, there are opportunities whose greatness no sane man would dispute; and it would be well for those whose life is before them to learn to understand and value how much is theirs and how soon and how surely it will pass away. It is too late to break the alabaster box when Jesus is in His grave.

Perhaps there are few who realize the transiency of the home. As each day runs its commonplace round, the unspeakable privilege of living in the most intimate communion with those whom of all the world we love the most, is apt to be forgotten. There may indeed be kindness enough; but how much more tender and affectionate it might be if we remembered how frail are the bonds that unite us, and how soon some of them will be broken.

It is proper and necessary that friendships be formed outside of the family circle; for the home does not exhaust the great world, and only in the duties and friendships of the larger life beyond it can our nature be even approximately completed. Nor can we forget that sometimes friends may be even

"more than my brothers are to me."

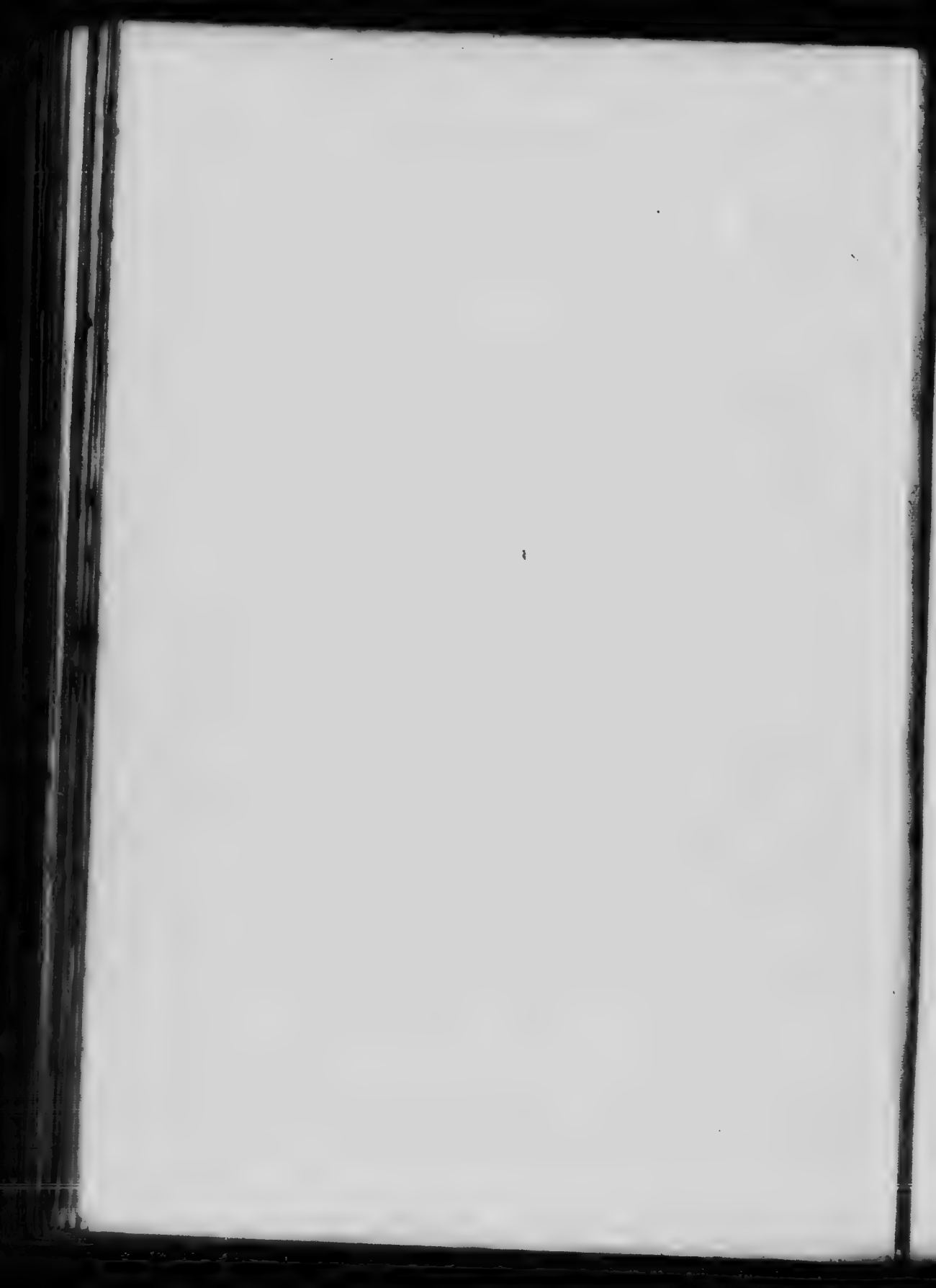
Still, the home includes the most intimate and sacred of all relationships; and there is something almost awe-inspiring in the swiftness with which they can be sundered. In a year or two, a month or two, sometimes,—indeed, in a moment,—its

seeming permanence dissolves, and the happy circle becomes but a memory—a vision seen through blinding tears. A man may find friends—though perhaps not many—anywhere and at any time; but the dear faces of the home are not with us always. The claims of business, profession or pleasure, may take the son to a far country; and when he comes back, his mother is in her grave. And then how he wishes he had worked a good work upon her when she was with him! Yes! now he would break his costliest alabaster box a thousand times over for her gentle sake. But she is sleeping her dreamless sleep, and the dear lips are cold.

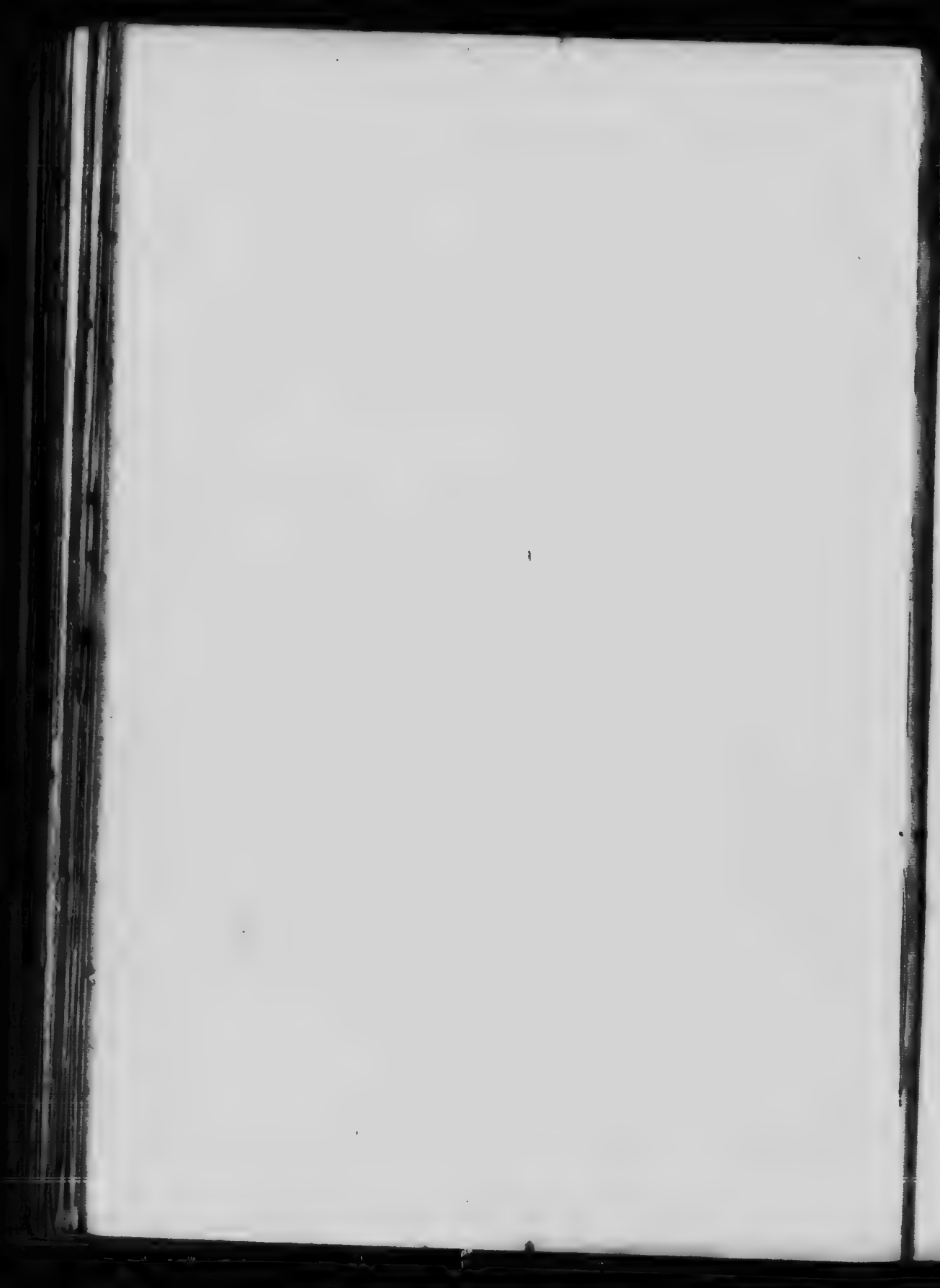
"Me ye have not always with you." Oh, why do we take so long to learn a lesson so simple? Sooner or later, every home crumbles away; but as we gather round the table we never think of this. It is well that such a thought should not haunt us for ever, but surely it should visit us sometimes. The brother is rough to the sister, the son is rude to the father, the husband is a little unmindful of the wife; and all the time they love each other. "What fools these mortals be!" Why should they forget that they have not each other for ever, or that life is too short for strife? Marriage or business will separate them soon enough, or death will come with its more awful separation. And then those who are left will yearn, in bitter sincerity, for "the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a

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voice that is still." But while the hand that will vanish is still with us, shall we not do something to lighten the burden of its toil? And while the voice still speaks that will one day be silent, shall we not listen to it with an almost tremulous sense of the privilege that is ours? Common friends we shall find again; but the well-beloved of our homes we shall not have always with us. While we have them, then, let us love them and cherish them and work a good work upon them, before the night cometh when we can work for them no more.



THE VALLEY OF DEATH



THE VALLEY OF DEATH

"They stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army "

THERE is perhaps no passage in all the Bible which, for weird imaginative power, surpasses Ezekiel's Vision of Dry Bones. By means that are as simple as simple can be, he transports us into a veritable valley of death, and the gloom and the horror of it enter our souls. We shall let the prophet himself lead us into the valley, and tell us what he saw, and how he felt, and what the vision did for him. This is the story in his own words, with something of their muffled music :

Jehovah touched me with His mighty hand,
And bore me in the spirit to a valley,
And in the midst thereof He set me down,
And it was full of bones ; and round and round
Among the bones He led me. And, behold !
Thickly they lay upon the valley's face,
Exceeding many and exceeding dry.
Then thus He spake to me : " O child of man !
Can these bones live ? " " O Lord," I said, " Thou knowest.
" Lift up thy voice," He said, " and prophesy
Upon these bones, and in these words address them :
Ye dry bones, listen to Jehovah's word.'
Thus saith Jehovah to these bones, ' Behold !

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I will breathe into you the breath of life,
 Sinews and flesh will I bring up on you,
 And I will cover you with skin, and put
 The breath of life in you : then ye shall know
 That I am God the Lord Omnipotent.'"
 Straightway I prophesied as I was bidden,
 And, as I prophesied, behold ! a shaking !
 Each several bone drew near unto his fellow.
 And, as I gazed, behold ! there came upon them
 Sinews and flesh and skin to cover them.
 But still within them was no breath of life.
 "Lift up thy voice," He said, "and prophesy.
 Speak to the wind, thou child of man, and say,
 'Thus saith the Lord Omnipotent : O wind !
 Come hither from all quarters of the heavens,
 And breathe upon these slain that they may live.'"
 So then I prophesied as He had bade me,
 And into them there came the breath of life ;
 As living men, they stood upon their feet—
 A mighty host and great exceedingly.

In an ecstatic mood, the prophet is borne upon the wings of his sombre imagination to a valley filled with human bones—weird, gruesome, chaotic ; for they are not even skeletons, but an indiscriminate mass of bones. No prospect could have been more forlorn or unpromising. There they lie, sad emblem of a hopeless, lifeless people—the *living dead*.

Round and round the valley the prophet is led by his mysterious guide, the only living man in the grim silent valley. And everywhere are bones—the face of the valley is thick with them, so many that the soil beneath them does not peer through :

bones exceeding many and exceeding dry. Dry—for it is long, long, since the warm sap of life was about them; and they are so shrivelled and wizened that nothing but a miracle can ever bring the life about them again. "Behold!" says the prophet sadly, casting his despondent glance upon them, as he moves about the valley. "Behold them—exceeding many and exceeding dry."

The awful silence is broken by a divine voice: is it the voice of the prophet's own questioning heart? "Man! can these bones live?" What shall the poor prophet say? He cannot say Yes, and he cannot say No. He cannot say Yes; for the true prophet is sane. He does not deceive himself; he measures the factors with which he has to deal, and he will not make the mistake of under-estimating his problem. He knows that there is little prospect for dry bones. But neither can he say No; for with God all things are possible. Is anything too hard for the Lord? The wizened bones may—yes, by the omnipotent grace of God, they may—yet become men of flesh and blood. The prophet therefore answers with reverent humility: "O Lord Jehovah, thou knowest."

Then, to our surprise, instead of Jehovah Himself addressing the bones and rousing them to unity and life by His word of thunder, He turns to the prophet, and bids *him* pronounce the magic

word. "Prophecy thou over the bones." The divine and resuscitating word is to be spoken by God's human servant. "Dry Bones"—they are thus addressed as if that were their name—"listen": among those dead ones there are still, it would seem, slumbering possibilities—"listen to the word of Jehovah," the word, that is, that falls from the lips of His prophet.

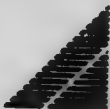
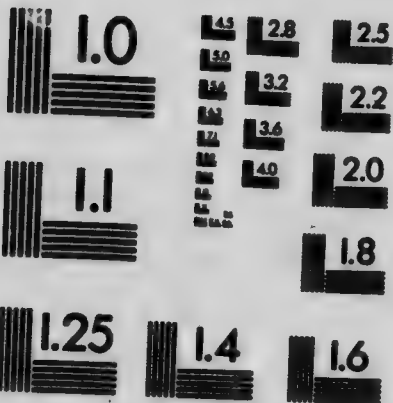
Then the word rings out across the valley with weird and solemn echoes: "Thus saith the Lord Jehovah to these bones, 'Behold!'"—for what is about to happen is marvellous—"Behold! I will put breath into you, and ye shall live.'" Jehovah, who breathed into the nostrils of the first man the breath of life, is able and ready to work His ancient wonder upon less promising subjects and on a more splendid scale. Breath is the greatest thing, the necessary thing, to a living man—mentioned here first, and as God's own gift; till they get their breath, they will be of no use. But it is imparted last. First, the dry and wizened bones must be clothed with flesh and sinews, and then, when they look like human beings, they will be ready for breath. And finally, when they stand upon their feet, an exceeding great army, the breath of life in their nostrils and the light of life in their eyes, then they will know "that I am Jehovah." For those hopeless men, of whom the sapless bones are the emblem, do not yet rightly know what manner

of God is theirs, and how by His mighty power He can revive them again.

So the prophet, believing in God, and in the resurrection of the dead, prophesied as he was bidden, astonished to hear the sound of his own voice re-echoing across the dismal valley, and awaiting the result with curious expectancy. And soon it came. There was a shaking. The mighty word produces a movement among the bones. The prophet's word is Jehovah's word, and they have to listen. Then follows one of the weirdest scenes in literature. The bones that are isolated and scattered, without cohesion, move silently, mysteriously, toward each other, each into its proper place, bone fitting bone, so that now we have at least the semblance of men. The scattered bones have at least become skeletons. And then, with the same silence and the same mystery, as the prophet looks, the bones begin to be clothed with flesh and sinews and skin, and the skeletons begin at least to look like men. But, alas! they are still as dead as ever, for "breath in them was none." And, lying on their backs there, speechless and blind and dead, they are almost more terrible than when we first saw them as the bones that bleached the plain. Step by step they have advanced from being an incoherent mass of bones to assume the comely shape of men. But the greatest step of all has yet to be taken, the step without which all that is yet



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done amounts to nothing; and that requires a special effort and another prophetic appeal.

So again "He said to me, 'Prophesy'"; and as it is breath that is needed, breath must be summoned. To the Hebrew, wind, breath, and spirit were the same. So the prophet, who had spoken with power to the bones, now speaks to the wind—the wind which must obey its Lord, the wind which blows throughout His universe—and summons it to come and blow upon these dead, these slain, that they may live. Again therefore, in faith, the prophet prophesies as he is bid, and the wind obeys as the bones had done. The spirit came. Its refreshing breezes blew across the lifeless valley, and each dead man got his share of it; and, as they felt the pulse of the new life run through them, they rose from the ground on which they had lain prostrate, and stood upon their feet, silent and orderly, "an army great exceedingly, exceedingly." And this host that has risen from the dead is almost as terrible as was the grim valley with its multitude of bones—terrible now, not with death, but with life and power. Standing now upon their feet, shoulder to shoulder, in marching order, these men are ready to march to their own dear land in the west, and to deal mighty blows in the battles of the Lord.

We are not left to guess the meaning of the vision, though that would be simple enough: the prophet has himself explained it for us. The bones

are the nation, "the whole house of Israel"; it is the living men who are dead. Their life is bound up inseparably with the life of the nation. When she lives, they live in her; and when she dies, they are as good as dead. The exile had extinguished the national life, and the exiles, counting themselves as men already dead and in their graves, deplore their fate in these words: "Our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are undone." But when the prophet proclaims, in faith and courage, his resuscitating word, the hopeless become hopeful, and the dead arise. "I have said it, and I will do it, saith Jehovah."

Much as this vision suggests to any man who has the eyes to see it, it suggests most of all to the preacher, who is the modern representative of the prophet; for him it is full of delicate hints as to the source of his power, the origin of his message, the indispensableness of his service to the community.

For one thing, the preacher needs imagination. It is his to utter the thing that he has seen: he cannot utter it well, strictly speaking he cannot utter it at all, until he has seen it. He cannot show what he has not seen. Ezekiel's description of the valley of death lays its weird spell upon our hearts, because he had looked upon the valley with his own eyes. He had stood within it, sorrowful and terrified; he had heard the shaking, he had watched

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with awe the creeping of the bones together, and their marvellous investiture with flesh and sinew: his heart had bounded as he saw the army silently rise to its feet. He makes us feel it all, because he felt it; he describes the valley well, because he had been there. So the preacher must bring to the text he expounds or the scene he describes not only mind, but imagination. He must learn to use his eyes. He cannot guide another into the valley which he has not seen himself.

Mark also how the preacher's message comes to him by brooding over the experience of his people. The vision which Ezekiel saw in the spirit was borne in upon him as he reflected upon the hopeless words of his broken-hearted people. "Behold," *they say*, "our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are undone." These words of theirs ring in his ears, they pierce him to the heart, they haunt his mind, they sink deep into his imagination. He turns them "round about and round about" till at last, when the ecstatic mood comes over him, he is ushered by them into a silent valley full of the bones of dead men. The true preacher, like the prophet, is one who moves among the people, and knows what they are saying: one whose ears are sensitive to every murmur of the religious and intellectual life of the time, of the social and political life, the individual and national life, and who can relate his ministry to that.

The preacher, further, must be a man both of sanity and of faith. Of sanity: for, when he looks at the dead men before him, whom it is his duty and his privilege to rouse into life, he will recognize that the task is a terrible one,—he will not deceive himself about that. A young man may be tempted to suppose that, before the enthusiasm and eloquence of his sermons, the strongholds of sin and indifference will fall, as the walls of Jericho fell at the blast of Joshua's trumpets. But the experienced preacher knows very well that these strongholds are not so easily overthrown. He knows that the best he may do may elicit but little or no response. When he asks himself if these dead men to whom he ministers can live, he will not say that it is impossible, but he knows that it will be infinitely hard. No power but that of God Himself can effect a resurrection from the dead.

But, on the other hand, it is his duty to believe in, and, believing in, to work for, this national resurrection. The men before him may be dead, but they are men: they have in them the capacity to be an exceeding great army. If he be a true prophet of God, with any vision in his soul, and any love for men, he will hope and believe all things of them. It doth not yet appear what they shall be. With the eyes of faith he will see, as he preaches, the grim silent valley stir with life. He will preach in the faith that the dead can be raised.

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He will hear the rush of life, where before was the silence of death. He will see the dead men before him—if not all of them, yet some—stand up upon their feet, ready to take their place, like good soldiers of Jesus Christ, in the great army of the Lord, to fight the eternal battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. He must preach and work with this faith in the possibility of individual recovery, of national resurrection. Otherwise, his calling is a mockery, and his appeals are vain. When the divine voice says to him, "Prophesy over these dry bones, and say unto them, 'Listen,'" he instantly and hopefully obeys.

The prophet's voice, ringing triumphantly through the valley of the dead, reminds us of the power of the preacher in the national life. The dead men can indeed live again: but, under God, the transformation is effected by the prophet. The voice which calls those bones together and lifts those dead men to their feet is a human voice—it is none other than the voice of the preacher. It is he, with his message, who puts hope into the hopeless and life into the dead. How often the words "breath" and "prophesy" occur in this passage! What the dead men lack, as they lie there on the plain upon their backs, looking so like living men—what they lack is breath, that is, *inspiration*; and this comes to them through the word of the prophet or the preacher. He may have to speak, like Ezekiel, twice, or he may have to speak a hundred

times; but it is when he prophesies as he is commanded that there is at length a shaking among the bones. It is then that they stand upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

It would be almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of the true preacher in the national life. He is the man with the breath of another life within him, with the light of another life in his eyes. Whoever else is alive in this valley of death, he at any rate must be alive. He must possess the word of power. He must remind the people of the things they are forgetting. When by the rivers of Babylon they sit down disconsolate and weep, he must put them again in mind of Jerusalem. When they are allowing the business of Babylon—the pursuit of wealth or pleasure or honour—to dry up their affection for God and for the things of their deeper life, then it is for the prophet to stand forth, and speak his trumpet word across the valley, and recall his people, his Church, or his nation, to the things they have forsaken or forgotten.

If the preacher prophesies, like Ezekiel, as he is commanded, preaches with fervour and imagination and affection the gospel he is commissioned to preach, there will assuredly be a shaking among the bones, and one here and another there will leap to his feet to fight for the Lord. More than upon any one else does the revival of national life depend upon the preacher. It is he, under God, who speaks the word that raises a people from the dead.

DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH

"He followeth not with us"

A STRANGELY pathetic interest attaches to a great disciple when we find him making a great mistake. For even loyal disciples are not infallible. Sometimes they seriously misrepresent the mind of Jesus, and have to be brought back to wisdom by the stern way of rebuke. Such a rebuke was once administered to John the beloved. And it was very necessary, for he had been betrayed by his zeal into a great error. He had misread the large charity of Jesus. He had taken it upon him to rebuke one who had been doing beneficent work in the name of Jesus; and Jesus had been constrained to rebuke him in the memorable words, "Forbid him not."

The attitude of John is remarkable; more remarkable still is the reason for that attitude. "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name; and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us." One would have supposed that John might well have felt sure of this man, for he had given two indubitable proofs of being on the side of Jesus. He was casting out devils—and was not that part of the

very work which Jesus had commissioned His disciples to do? And he was doing this in Jesus' name, proving thereby that he was a believer in the power of that name and a disciple at heart; for, as Jesus said, no man could do a mighty work in His name and thereafter lightly revile Him. But John, with sublime indifference to these conclusive marks of discipleship, condemns and forbids him for no better reason than that "he followeth not with us." We would say it was amazing if we did not know that it was the way of the human heart always. It is indeed the commonplace of Church history. We forbade him, because he followeth not with us.

Apparently, then, it is possible for those who love Jesus dearly to misunderstand Him seriously, and to hamper the work of others who are serving Him with as much zeal as themselves and with more intelligence; for we cannot help feeling that the unknown man who owes his place in history to John's foolish rebuke, had an instinctive penetration into the essential conditions of discipleship far superior to John's own. For John's measure of discipleship was, at any rate for the moment, a purely external one—he followeth not with us—whereas this man felt that the true disciple is one who does the work of the Master, and that whether he follows "with us" or not is a matter of the most utter indifference. Of course there were reasons at that time why John should have so completely, though mis-

takenly, identified the cause of his Master with that of His little disciple band; all the same, there is struck here the first note of that well-intentioned arrogance which has seldom been wanting in the history of the Church. It has too often seemed to the powers that be that because some one "followeth not with us," does not share their opinions or endorse their methods, he is necessarily wrong, and must therefore be denounced, censured, or excommunicated, as the temper of the age suggests; whereas all the time it may be he that is right and they that are wrong. He may be, by his actions or words, interpreting the spirit of his Master far more profoundly than they; and they may need the solemn rebuke, "Forbid him not."

In this spirit which is ever ready to rebuke unconventional service, there is something not altogether to be despised, for it is animated by jealousy for the honour of the Lord. Nevertheless, it is one of the most hateful sins of which a disciple of Christ can be guilty. For in insisting upon external standards, it displays a lack of insight into the real conditions of service; in rebuking a man who is doing the work of Jesus in the name of Jesus it displays an utter lack of charity as well as of intelligence; and in hampering the work of a sincere, devoted and intelligent servant, it is injuring the work of Christ Himself, and retarding the progress of the world.

What is the condition of discipleship? Surely

it is not following "with us." For who are we? Poor, stupid, loveless mortals, who at the best "know in part and prophesy in part," and at the worst are but caricatures of the ideals to which we aspire. Surely it is not adhesion to us but to Christ that is the true test of discipleship. Does the man about whose loyalty we are in doubt, and whose work we are thirsting, like John, to interrupt—does he "follow with Christ"? If he does, that ought to settle the matter for us. But how shall we know whether he follows with Christ? In the last resort we cannot know, for only the Lord can look upon the heart. But so far as we may know at all, we have no other basis for judgment than that indicated by Jesus Himself when He said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." What a man does is the best available index to what he is; and if the business of his life is casting out devils—and the modern world is almost as full of devils as the ancient ever was—then we may well take his loyalty for granted. Or if we must suspect it, let us suspect along with it our own intelligence; let us suspect our interpretation of the mind and heart of Christ. For if Christ was misunderstood and misrepresented even by the man who lay upon His bosom, it will be no great wonder if we misunderstand Him too.

It is unspeakably pathetic that such a reason should have been so often offered throughout the history of the Church for thwarting the unconven-

tional service of some fellow-disciple—"he followeth not with us." Is he any the worse for that? For again, let us ask, who are we? Necessarily but a fraction of the great Church of Christ, and no more infallible than any other fraction. For it puts a considerable strain upon our credulity to suppose that any group of mortal men has a monopoly of divine truth. Therefore our standards of judgment are necessarily limited, and may even be false, as John's were. The truculent and peremptory prohibition by which we think to do Christ honour, may be answered by Him with a rebuke. And when we shut out of our fellowship a man who is doing gracious and helpful work in the name of Jesus, the loss is rather ours than his. It is he and not we who represents the true Church; and no excommunication of ours can really deprive him of that "cheerful liberty of heart" which belongs to the brave and sincere. But he is vexed, though scarcely surprised, to find that so many who have ranged themselves under the banner of Christ have forgotten that where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

The Church, as President Rush Rhees once said, has often shown herself strangely "inhospitable to unfamiliar truth." Too often has her motto been, "We forbade him." Christ was brought to His Cross by the chief priests, the scribes and the elders; that is, by the officials of the Church of His

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own time. His truth was too revolutionary and unpalatable, and they "forbade" Him by nailing Him to a tree. That was the Jewish Church; here—in the story we are considering—is the Christian Church in embryo, forbidding one who cast out devils in Christ's name. It was the Church that compelled Galileo to deny what to-day every school-boy knows to be true; and more than once within the last three centuries the Church has deliberately condemned an attitude which the advance of thought has later compelled her to tolerate, if not to accept. There is a bloody trail across the ages—trail of the innocent blood of those who were slain by the self-constituted defenders of the faith. The persecutors were by no means always bad men. They were often only conventional men, of scrupulous but unenlightened conscientiousness, who could not appreciate a nobler and more daring type of service than their own; and their weapons were the faggot, and the thumbscrew, and the rack, and the boot, and a thousand other unimaginably fiendish things forged in the furnaces of hell.

The weapons of persecution have changed, but the spirit is ever the same—the spirit which in other days would have kindled the faggot, but which dare not do so to-day because of the brave stand for liberty and truth made by the men whom it murdered. "We forbade him;" and Jesus said: "Forbid him not." The spirit of Jesus is slowly work-

ing, and there are signs that the day is perhaps not so very far distant when men who are casting out devils in His name will be free to do their work serenely, none either daring or desiring to make them afraid. Then the true Church union will be consummated; for then men will be more eager to welcome than to forbid, more ready to accentuate the glorious hopes they share in common than the relatively trivial speculations which divide them. They will care more for the person of Christ than for a particular view of His person, and more for truth than for a specific formulation of it. So long as we refuse to welcome other disciples of Christ—be they men or churches—simply because they “follow not with us,” we shall have to remain in an isolation that is anything but splendid—the poorer for the lack of the resources and stimulus which they might bring us. When we recognize the relative unimportance of the things which separate us, and what Réville has called “the inanity of all these discussions in matters which exceed the capacity of our intelligence,” then will be seen the folly of saying, “We forbade him, because he followeth not with us;” and such a whisper will not be heard in all the land.

The devils are legion; and all who are striving to cast them out are the friends of Jesus. Wherever there is a man doing what in him lies, in the spirit of Jesus, to check political corruption or

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municipal incompetence, gambling or drunkenness, prurient literature or degrading amusements, false or inadequate conceptions of the Bible or religion, disintegrating views of private duty or social morality, there is a man—whether his methods be unconventional or not, whether he “follows with us” or not—who deserves a royal welcome from all who count themselves the friends of Jesus. “Forbid him not,” says Jesus. We may indeed, in an unconsidered enthusiasm for the cause we love, defy this solemn word of Jesus; and if we please, we may rebuke or persecute the man whose chief crime is that he “followeth not with us.” But let us not forget that “inasmuch as ye did it unto him, ye did it unto Me.”

ONE HAVING AUTHORITY

ONE HAVING AUTHORITY

"He taught them as one having authority"

JESUS was a teacher, and His teaching astonished those whom He taught. In the literal sense, it was extra-ordinary; that is, it did not find its place within the ordinary. It belonged to another order altogether. There were then, as there are to-day, two ways of teaching—the way of Jesus, and the way of the scribes. The way of Jesus astonished everybody; the way of the scribes astonished nobody, except, perhaps, Jesus—for must He not many a time have listened with sad, if not angry, wonder to their lifeless exposition of the living oracles of His God?

Between Him and the teachers of His time there was a great gulf fixed—in method, in influence, in everything. Almost the only thing that, as teachers, they had in common, was that they used the same text-book, and that only threw into the more glaring light the contrast between the freshness, the freedom, the power, the originality, of the one, and the literalism, the conventionality, the barrenness, of the other. The stupidest person in

the synagogues could not fail to see the difference. Jesus spoke as one having authority; they spoke as men who had none. His words carried conviction; their words carried none. His speech smote the heart and conscience; theirs got no farther than the head, and produced little effect even there. You could not listen to Jesus without being interested, arrested. You might be provoked, but you could not be indifferent. You could not leave the synagogue the same man as you entered; you would be another—worse, if not better.

There is an infinite pathos in this simple contrast between the teaching of Jesus and that of the scribes. His words had the ring of authority, and the people instinctively felt that that was not how their scribes spoke. The professional teachers lacked that note of authority without which all teaching is a mockery, not to say a crime. For is it not a crime to attempt to command the heart and conscience of another by the presentation of a truth which does not command and inspire our own? With Jesus, teaching was a matter of life and death; with the scribes it was a matter of profession. They looked upon the surface of the Old Testament, Christ looked into its heart. And is it any wonder that the people were astonished? As some one has said, Jesus spoke *with* authority, they spoke *by* authority. They quoted their rabbis; Jesus quoted nobody, because the evidence of the truth

was in His heart, and the zeal for it consumed Him.

The hungry souls know very well whether they are being fed or not. Their teachers may array themselves in professional robes, they may give themselves professional airs, they may learnedly discuss religious difficulties, and show themselves conversant with the history of opinion, but to the soul that is starving for a word from God these things are nothing but a cruel delusion. The real question is, Can the teacher speak with authority? Do his words pierce and burn? Do they find me? The scribes were those whose words should have been able to do that, for it was their business to meditate on God's law day and night. Yet the people are startled when they hear a voice speaking with authority, for their own scribes, they felt, had none. The surprise of the audience at the fresh and authoritative message of Jesus is a painful comment on the inefficiency of the conventional teaching, and a sad reminder of the dangers of professionalism. The greatest Teacher does not belong to the ranks of the professionals at all. He takes His lonely place over against them, and has to wage with them a ceaseless warfare, which only ends when they bring Him to His Cross—for that was His earthly reward for teaching with authority. The common people heard Him gladly, but the professional teachers gnashed their teeth, and vowed that they

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would have none of this man or His teaching. They could not bear one who swept aside their traditions, ignored their appeals to the learned rabbis, and supported His truth on nothing but His imperious "I say unto you."

The great teacher is always rare. When he comes, we recognize him, not only as one who speaks with authority, but as one who is not as the scribes; that is, not as those other teachers whose special training and manifold opportunities should have enabled them to edify and astonish the people more than he. Clearly, there is more than learning and professional training needed to make a man a great preacher or teacher. What, then, is the secret of authoritative speech?

The thing most needful, and almost the one thing needful, is that the speaker should believe what he is saying. This seems an elementary demand; in reality it is the greatest of all demands. There are a hundred men who can speak, for one who really believes, and the only speech which strikes home and leaves its mark upon another soul is the speech of profound and passionate conviction. Man is more than mind, and belief is more than a thing intellectual. The teacher who covets earnestly the power of speaking with authority must believe his truth, not only with the understanding, but with the heart. He utters it, not as a proposition he can prove, but as a truth that has set his heart on fire.

The impression he makes lies deeper than his words; it is the magnetism of the man—the inherent, transparent power of his message, and not the logic of his words—that carries conviction. The truth glows in his face, shines from his eyes. It does not so much belong to him as he belongs to it. It is not he that speaks, but a spirit that is speaking in him. He is not his own; he is urged on by an irresistible impulse to tell the thing he knows and lives by. He has mastered the truth, but the truth has also mastered him. He is the ambassador of the highest, and that is why he is lord, and why he can speak as one having authority.

To speak as one having authority, you must really have it, otherwise you are not wonderful, but ridiculous. And to have the authority, you must qualify yourself by the severest discipline of mind and heart. You cannot hope to speak with authority unless you meditate day and night. No man has the right to commend to other men his undigested thoughts. But besides knowing the truth, we must feel absolutely sure of it. We must be fully persuaded in our own minds. Half convictions will not do. We cannot effectively transfer to another mind a truth that does not possess and govern our own. Nothing but soul can reach soul. Our belief must be a faith, an enthusiasm, a passion, and it must be uttered without regard to consequences. The speaker must think of nothing but

his truth, and of the souls he knows his truth can bless. If he thinks of what he himself has to gain or lose by proclaiming it, his authority vanishes, as it deserves to vanish, for it is the single eye that God loves. Many of the greatest masters of authoritative speech perished on the rack or among the flames. The greatest Master of all was lifted upon a cross. Yet they were persuaded that God was for them. They had the divine consciousness of being His ambassadors; and they could speak their brave and lonely word, knowing that the future would justify them.

And the words of such men, though they be despised and rejected, never fail to astonish. Prophets are never so numerous that the people get accustomed to them. Scribes enough there always are, but there is only one Jesus. And His true disciples are known by the possession of that fearless and original spirit that was in Him. "When they beheld the boldness of Peter and John," we read, "they marvelled, and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." There is no mistaking the men who have been with Jesus, and who have caught His note of authority. Queen Elizabeth's ambassador said of John Knox's preaching, "The voice of him stirred me more than five hundred trumpets." Such a man may be welcomed, or he may be rejected, but he cannot be mistaken. Anywhere he is head and shoulders above the

people. He believes the truth with his soul, he utters it with tongue of fire, and he would die for it.

And the truth which he believes and passionately utters must be truth by which a man can live. It is one thing to believe that two and two make four; it is another thing to believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The latter belief will change my world for me, and the world of any other man whom I can persuade to accept it. But there is much so-called religious teaching that does not deal with the deepest things. It may tell us of the flowers and trees of Palestine, of the scenery upon which Christ daily looked from His Gal'ilean home, of the manners and customs of those to whom He ministered, of the literary structure of the sacred books which He read. It is well to know these things; the more of them we know the better. But that is not religious teaching, and if the teacher does no more than that for us, he does nothing. It is not enough to tell us the pattern of the hem of Christ's garment. He must touch it, and he must speak to us with the glad enthusiasm of one who has been healed by the touch. He must wake in our hearts the dreams, the imaginations, the visions, the faiths, which throb and glow in the hearts of the men who wrote the Bible. Let him, by all means, do all he can to bring back that bygone world, and restore to us its ancient life; but let him

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not forget the most living thing of all—the souls of the men whose words he studies, and the mighty messages that came to them from their God.

Nobody will speak with any permanent authority who does not deal with the highest things; his words must be aimed at the conscience and the heart. It was not by remarks on Palestinian topography or archæology that Paul made Felix tremble; it was by burning words about a judgment to come. Every public address of Jesus, His sermon on the hill, His parables in the synagogues, is a direct appeal to the moral and religious nature. There is no irrelevancy, no trifling, in the epistles of Paul. There all is deadly earnest. The truth which will tell is truth about the vital things—truth which will reach the heart of the hearer because it rises out of the depths of the speaker's deepest experience. Every man, in his measure, must be able to challenge his audience with an "I say unto you." He must appeal to them with a truth which he has tested, and which he knows can make men glad and strong and free.

THE LORD UPON HIS THRONE

THE LORD UPON HIS THRONE

"I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne"

ASSUREDLY one of the greatest scenes in the Bible or out of it is the inaugural vision of the prophet Isaiah. In words that are few and altogether simple, it leads us into mysterious presences, and he would be dull indeed whose soul caught nothing of the solemn grandeur of it all. Indeed, so grand is it that we are tempted to put it away from us as an experience altogether unique—a vision which Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw, but not such as we ourselves might see. A closer study of it, however, will serve to disabuse our minds of this idea; for, though the form of the vision was determined by Isaiah's experience, and the account of it is stamped with the dignity of his royal soul, in all that is essential that vision may be appropriated by any man to-day, who brings to the consideration of his life-work the same self-knowledge, sincerity, and devotion.

Isaiah was a young man—hardly over twenty-five, if indeed as old. He had lived through half of the brilliant reign of Uzziah, when both Judah

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and Israel had enjoyed a prosperity greater than either had seen since the time of David. But eyes so clear as his must have seen below this brilliant surface. The moral corruption of Israel had already been exposed—sternly by Amos, and with a more passionate tenderness by Hosea. Judah, we may be sure, was not much better. Isaiah knew that his home was “among a people of unclean lips.” He may have known the work of those two prophets; in any case he could read the ominous signs of Judah for himself. With the sincerity of youth, he pondered over them; and, with the eagerness of youth, he resolved to dedicate his life to his country and his God.

The inaugural vision shows what a power religion must already have had over this man. It is told in terms of the temple worship. It was from the temple court that he saw the vision; and the song of the seraphim was doubtless suggested to him by the songs he had frequently heard in the temple. It was no accident that the vision of Jehovah came to him in the temple. Often, perhaps, he had wistfully looked for Him there, watching as they that watch for the morning. Had the heart of this young man not already been at home with thoughts of God, we may be sure that he would never have seen Him upon His throne “in the year that king Uzziah died.”

The vision of Isaiah was a vision of God—of

God upon His throne. "In the year of the death of the king Uzziah, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" above the chances and changes of earthly things. Earthly kings might pass away, their thrones might totter and fall; but that soul must be steady that, through all the confusions, sees and believes in the heavenly King, who is immortal, and the heavenly throne, which no storm can shake, but which standeth fast for ever. For the God whom Isaiah saw was a God of indescribable glory. The prophet, though he is a supreme master of the literary art, saw things which it was not possible for him to utter. He describes for us the seraphim in a few mysterious but suggestive words. But the Lord whom he saw is too great for description, too glorious even to look upon. The eyes of the prophet are cast down in humility. He will not lift them up to the glorious face; he sees nothing of Him but the majestic sweep of His radiant garments. And the great Lord is surrounded by beings who praise and serve Him—praise Him out of lips that are not unclean, and serve Him not only in the temple but in any part of the universe where their service is needed; for, with those nimble wings, they are ready, like Isaiah after his consecration, to fly wherever their Lord sends them. The song they sing is a song of the eternal world. One choir lifts up its voice with its

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"Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts ;"
and the other responds—

"The whole earth is full of His glory."

We pray that His name may be hallowed and that His kingdom may come ; but the eyes of those mysterious servants round about the throne see beyond all the sins and confusions of history, beyond the wicked kingdom and the dying king, to that eternal world where His name is already hallowed and His kingdom already come.

That, then, is the vision which steadied Isaiah on the threshold of his career, and sent him forth with fearless and quiet heart to face the obstinacy and the opposition of men—the vision of the Lord upon His throne, surrounded by an atmosphere of praise and service, and reigning in a world which is full of His glory.

But when a weak and sinful man looks upon so glorious a God, his first impulse is to start back in confusion, or to throw himself upon his face. "Woe is me, for I am undone." "Who am I that I should go?" The weakness, and above all, the sin of the man, prostrates him.

"Then every evil word I had spoken once,
And every evil thought I had thought of old,
And every evil deed I ever did,
Awoke and cried, 'This quest is not for thee.'"

Before the blazing glory man can only hide his face, thankful if it does not consume him. The joy

of service is preceded by a holy terror in all profounder souls, who know their own sinfulness, and who, with that knowledge, have looked upon the holy King, whose glory fills the whole earth. It is strange, and yet it is not strange, that the great prophets shrank at first in terror from their task. A too great readiness to plunge into the awful work is a sure sign of a shallow soul—of a soul that has not measured its own weakness, the greatness of its task, or the majesty of its God.

But the feeling of prostration, though the first, is not the last. With their wings the shining ministers of God were ready to fly to any soul that needed help; and who more needy than the prostrate prophet, who has it in him to do great things, but who is overwhelmed by the consciousness of his own sin? So one of the seraphim flew, and with a glowing stone from off the altar touched the impure lips—those lips by which the preacher expresses his heart, and which must needs be clean—and said, "Thy sin is passed away." In other words, the prophet feels that the God whose glory has blinded and prostrated him, is also the Lord of hosts, who is prepared to equip him; and the first essential in his equipment is his forgiveness. When he is forgiven, when his lips are pure—then, and not till then, can he go forth to preach with power and confidence.

It is after he is forgiven that he hears the call. "He touched my lips and then I heard the voice of

the Lord." Man must be consecrated before he can hear the divine voice. It is the pure in heart who hear God. Now that he is a purged and redeemed soul, this man, with his splendid powers of intellect, heart, and literary gift, is ready like the seraphim to go wherever he is sent; and with his unstopped ears, he heard the voice of the glorious Lord who sat upon His throne saying in solemn and majestic tones, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" It is like the cry of a world in need uttered by lips divine, a cry which rings evermore in the ears of all truly consecrated souls. The fellowship which his pure spirit now enjoys with God is impelled to express itself in the service of his brethren—those people with the unclean lips, among whom he had his home. Briefly, reverently, as becomes the servant of the most High, he made answer in two Hebrew words, which summed up the absoluteness of his consecration: "Behold me, send me."

Mark that he is not specifically called of God. He calls himself; at least he offers himself. There are some who delude themselves with the hope that Almighty God will take and thrust them into some field of service, and that He will speak in their ear some audible word which will set their doubts at rest. But is that His way of dealing with men? He did not deal so with Isaiah. He did not say, "Isaiah, come hither; I summon thee." The cry is a general cry, thrown out, as it were, across the

world—"Who will go?" and it is for the man who has seen the vision and felt the impulse to service rise in his heart, to say for himself, "Behold me, send me." The world is very needy. It is crying with a thousand voices. In the homeland and in heathen lands across the sea, all down the centuries, all through our little lives, the divine cry is ringing, "Who will go for us?" God respects us too much to compel us. He will not force us to go. But where the need is so great, and the cry is so plain, let no man wait for any clearer call; let him respond at once in the simple, surrendering words of this great prophet, "Behold me, send me."

One who has seen the vision of God upon His throne, and who has spoken these words of ready service, goes forward with high hopes to his great task. He is borne out to the stormy sea of service upon the high tides of enthusiasm. If he be a young man, he expects, as a rule, that the vision he has to declare will be so compelling that men will feel constrained to yield themselves up to the power and the glory of it as he himself has yielded. But he has not travelled far till he is disillusioned. In very stern words, Isaiah is warned in his vision, at the very outset of his ministry, of what is certain to happen. Some hearts will of course be won; the vision and the word will compel them as they compelled him. But there are many that will reject the best and the bravest that we can do. It is no easy

matter to convince and convert a people of unclean lips—a people who are enjoying, as Judah then did, and as we are doing to-day, the dangerous fruits of a long material prosperity. The prophet saw that calamity would have to come; the land would have to be left a desolation before its proud and careless people could be brought to their senses. Till then, the more he preached, and the more familiar they grew with his message, the blinder would their eyes become, the "fatter" and the harder their hearts.

But, through sorrow and disappointment, the true man of God, like this great prophet of old, will continue to do his work with high hopes. His eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts, and that vision he will carry in his heart till his earthly work is done. The consummation may be far away, but he knows that it is sure. Above all the disillusionings of experience, and the complexities of history, the Lord sits for ever upon His throne, high and lifted up; and one day the whole earth will be so unmistakably full of His glory that all flesh shall see it together.

PREDESTINED

PREDESTINED

"Before I formed thee in the womb, I knew thee"

It is a great thing for a man to believe that he is where God means him to be; but it is a greater thing for him to believe that, in order to put him where he is, God has been shaping all his past, and that He was even thinking of him and planning for him before he was born. Such was the feeling with which Jeremiah entered upon his great career, and it is this that explains his life-long fidelity to his mission, continually assailed as he was by warrings without and fears within. It was not only the sense that God was with him, but that, even before his birth, he had been in the mind of God. A great work had to be done in the world, and there was no one to do it: a great word had to be spoken, and there was no one to speak it. And so God had, as it were, to create a special man: He needed a Jeremiah, and He made him. For his father He chose a priest. He set him in a family in which, from his birth, he would be in touch with the finer traditions of Israel. He gave him a home in the country, yet near enough the capital to become

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acquainted with its complex life. He led him gently along his early days and brought him to one solemn moment in which, despite much misgiving, he felt sure that he himself was the man divinely destined to proclaim the truth to his careless countrymen.

What a conviction this for a young man to reach, that he is the man called by destiny to the sublimest task to which any human being can be called—the task of uplifting the moral life of his generation! And what a moment it must have been, when this conviction was borne in upon him! How did he reach it? Doubtless there was something mysterious about the experience in which the conviction came to him. He saw a Hand, and the Hand seemed to touch his mouth. It was a mighty Hand. He felt its power upon his lips. It was the Hand of his God, whose form he does not describe any more than does Isaiah, but doubtless to him, in the moment, it was very real.

We must remember, however, that such a vision comes only to the man who is worthy of it, and, in a measure, prepared for it. Jeremiah, like Isaiah at his call, was a young man—he cannot have been over twenty-five, if as much; but so thoughtful and tender-hearted a man must have often brooded over the sins and the follies of his people. To such a people somebody must speak for God; and there gathers within him half unconsciously the feeling that his is the voice that must be lifted up—that he

is the man; till, in one sublime moment, the whole wonderful meaning of his career—his birth, his youth, his special and peculiar experiences—is flashed upon him. He sees that God had been thinking of him, caring for him, preparing for him, before he was born. Clearly, if the past and present have any meaning at all, he is God's marked man. No human life is hidden from God.

My frame was not hidden from Thee,
When I was made in secret,

And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

But this is peculiarly true of men who have a mighty work to do; and there is no thought which a man can take with him into his life-work that can steady and strengthen him like that. Paul had it too—he felt that God had separated him from his mother's womb; and though he never speaks of it again, any more than does Jeremiah, it must have been one of the most powerful influences in his career.

The sense that our past has been deliberately shaped by divine fingers, that God has not only put us where we are, but made us what we are—securing for us privileges and opportunities of birth and education, putting us through special experiences and disciplines, bringing us within the circle of certain friendships and affections, not only watching but moulding the events of our lives, and bringing us, to our astonishment, face to face with

a situation in which we are compelled to acknowledge that He is confronting us Himself : that is the greatest moment of our lives, when all this comes home to us. It fills us with awe; we are sure that we are in a mysterious Presence, and that the grasp of a divine Hand is upon us. It is indeed a great and awful moment; for then it is possible for us to make the great refusal, "I will not go, I cannot speak; for I am but a child."

Is it not strange that it is just when Jeremiah is most completely overwhelmed by the feeling that he is predestined by God for a great work, that he feels most acutely his own incapacity? His past career and his present consciousness unite in telling him that he has been set apart from common men and common work to be a unique man, and to do a special work; but this feeling, instead of exalting him, depresses him. He has not the steady soul of an Isaiah, whose eyes had seen the King. He is too conscious of his own weakness and of the power of the opposition to say, "Here am I, send me." "O Lord Jehovah," he says, "I do not know how to speak." He thinks of the frowning faces that will listen to his unwelcome message; thinks, perhaps, of the cruel voices that will clamour for his blood. He thinks, above all, of his own youth and inexperience. How shall he plead for God before men so much older than himself—masters of all the arts of worldly wisdom? His heart sinks as he

looks at it all, as he thinks of exchanging his quiet present for a future full of menace, disappointment and defeat.

It is often the greatest who hesitate. To shrink is at least to show that we have measured the magnitude of the task and the slenderness of our own resources. But the man who has heard the voice must obey it, unless he is prepared to see his future filled with desolation and remorse. There is a humility which is perhaps even more disastrous than pride. The proud man injures himself; the man who, in mistaken humility, makes the great refusal, injures the world by depriving it of the service he is fitted to render. Think for a moment of the incomparable loss to the world had Jeremiah finally yielded to the voice that spoke within him. His sense of weakness was, after all, a high qualification; it gave him sympathy with men, and it threw him back upon God. In some important directions Jeremiah's contribution to the religion of Israel is profounder than that of any other Hebrew, and there is no Old Testament character who is such a marvellous prototype of Jesus. And all this would have been lost to the world, had he listened to the voice that pled so plausibly for keeping aloof from the public life of his time.

Besides, in his humility, Jeremiah greatly underestimated the wonderful powers with which God had equipped him for his task. Sincerely enough

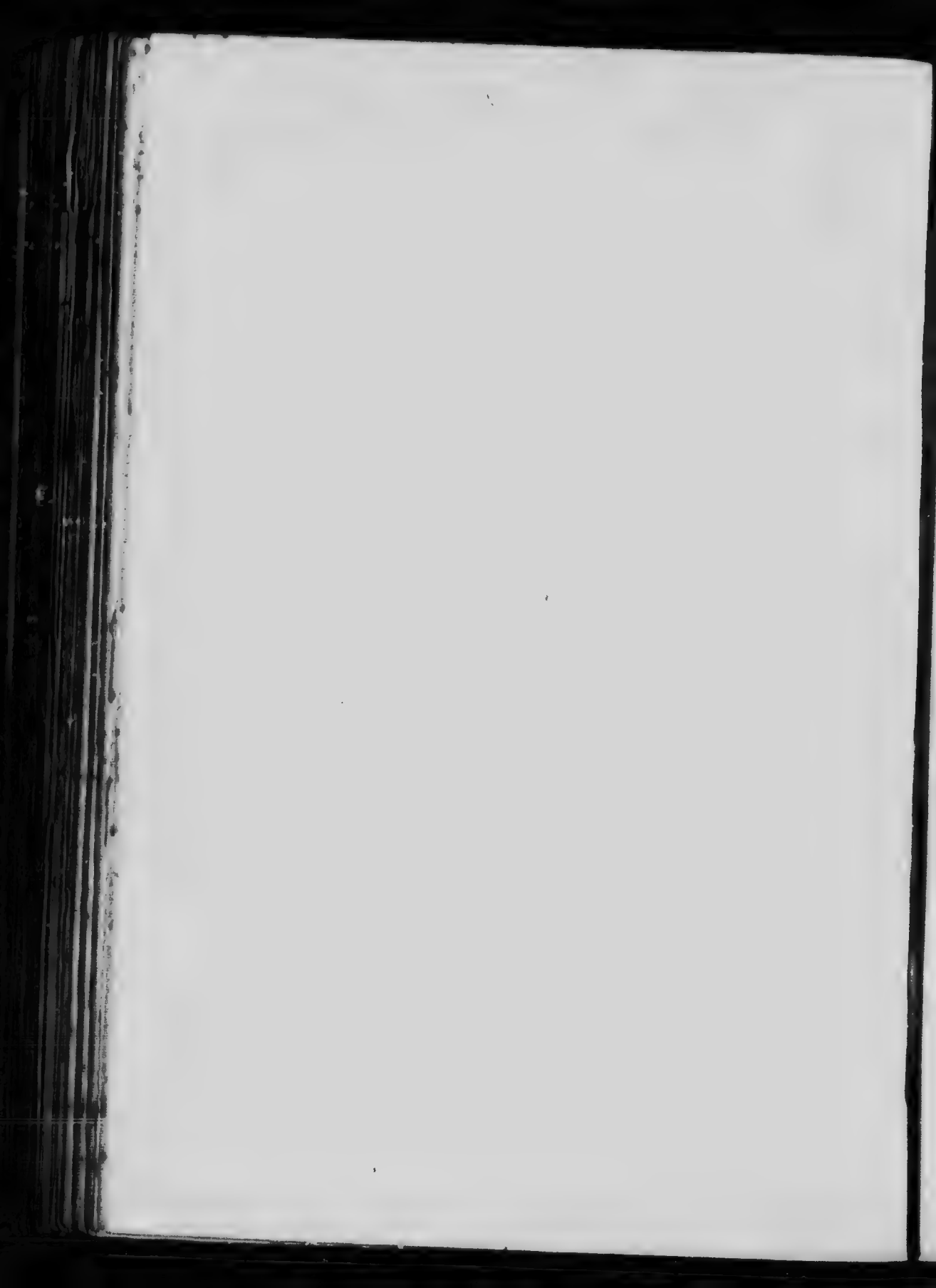
he said, "I cannot speak." But, in point of fact, there was no man in all Israel, and few men in all history, who could speak like Jeremiah. He is one of the great poets of the world, as many a touching elegy very clearly proves; and, even as a public speaker, he must have been a very striking figure, and produced the most profound impression.

The brave resolution to help his age which rises in Jeremiah's heart is crippled in two ways—by his inexperience and by his fear. He is afraid as he thinks of their faces—those hard, unsympathetic, cruel faces. The reassurance, "Be not afraid," gives us a glimpse into the prophet's timidity. He, the tenderest of Israel's prophets, with a heart as simple as a child's and as tender as a woman's, will have to face an opposition stern and unscrupulous, a persecution cunning and relentless. Every new audience he faces would be another appeal to his native timidity; but every such crisis would bring him a fresh reassurance of the divine presence, a clear echo of the voice that he had heard on the day of his call, "Be not afraid, for I am with thee."

The whole career of Jeremiah is a proof that this divine promise had been kept. In his own strength he could never have faced the fearful odds that were arrayed against him. Look at him as he calmly stands before a howling mob that demands his execution. At such a moment he is, indeed, in his own words, firm as a brazen wall against the whole

land—kings and priests and people. Why is he, the timid and the tender prophet, so calm amid these cruel shouts? Is it not because his God is with him, as He promised to be? With Jeremiah, as with Paul, power was made perfect in weakness. Each of these great men had to contend with serious natural disadvantages: their intrepid careers are proof abundant that the power which they displayed was not their own, but that their work was done in the strength of Him whom they served. Of themselves they were weak; but the grace of Another was sufficient for them, and the power of Another rested upon them.

Those who have been led to feel in some solemn hour that the hand of God has shaped their past and that the voice of God is calling them, may go forward with quiet and fearless hearts to the work that is theirs to do, strong in the assurance that the God who called them will also sustain them. In no conflict or crisis will they ever be alone, but evermore they will be beset behind and before by the most high God.



SPEARS AND PRUNING-HOOKS

SPEARS AND PRUNING-HOOKS

"They shall beat their spears into pruning-hooks"

SPEARS and pruning-hooks—what have they to do with each other? The one suggests cruelty; the other peace. The one calls up visions of bloody battlefields strewn with the corpses of men; the other, of hills with terraced slopes of vines. The soldier and the vine-dresser, the vintage of the grape and the awful vintage of blood—do these things not lie at opposite poles of the world? Perhaps; and yet they lie very close to each other too. The spear which slays the man is not so very unlike the instrument which prunes the vine; and it shall come to pass in the latter days, says a great prophet, that the one shall be turned into the other.

It is a great vision this that the prophet sees—of a world transformed by religion and common sense. The nations which are now ready to fly at each other's throats, will one day, he sees, be willing to take their cases to Zion for arbitration; as we should say to-day, they will submit them to Jesus, to have them decided by the principles of justice

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and humanity, which are identified with Him more than with any other force in the world. And then, so reasonable and satisfactory will the decision be, that they will fling away their weapons of war, for which they have now no more use, and men will be brothers the world over.

Yet, that is not exactly what the prophet sees. The nations do not fling away their weapons, nor do they destroy them; they transform them—by beating them into pruning-hooks. For every weapon of war there will be a use, even in the era of peace. The swords will not be shivered, they will be turned into ploughshares; the spears will not be snapped, they will be fashioned into pruning-hooks. The instruments which desolated the world, and filled it with blood and horror, are not to disappear; they are to be turned into instruments which will make it fair and fruitful—a very house of God and gate of heaven. It is not enough that men learn war no more, they must go on to learn the higher arts of peace. The ideal life or society does not consist in negations; it deals with its material in a constructive and transforming spirit. It delights to see the pruning-hook in the spear, and it hastens to transform the one into the other.

"Their spears into pruning-hooks." Here is an immortal rebuke to the spirit of waste. There may indeed be some things which it would be well to

banish from the face of the earth; but there are not many. Most things are capable of transformation, and were meant in the new era to be transformed, not destroyed. The danger lies not so much in the instrument as in the use to which it is put. The world is full of material which is morally neutral; whether we forge of it a spear or a pruning-hook will depend upon the kind of men we are. If we are men of war and strife, with no love for our fellows in our hearts, men who prefer the battlefield to the smiling countryside, then we shall forge of it a spear, with which we shall do cruel and deadly work that will bring us the hatred and the curses of the men whom we smite. But if we have in our hearts the desire to be at peace with all men, and to learn war no more, then we shall turn the raw material of life into instruments of blessing. Better a thousand times that the sword and the spear had never been fashioned at all: better that the metal which went to the making of them had at once been turned into ploughshares and pruning-hooks. But now that the deadly weapons have been forged, they are not to be destroyed, but transformed.

A great and far-reaching principle this! Nothing need be lost; all things may be transformed. The powers and energies which were dedicated to the cause of evil, if only they be touched and consecrated by a new sense of the meaning of life, will

be equally mighty when thrown upon the side of God and good. Paul, the tireless persecutor of the Christians, becomes the great missionary to the Gentiles.

Instruments the most unpromising can be redeemed. The thing which most of all needs to be destroyed is the blind spirit of destruction, and one of the gifts that most earnestly needs to be coveted is that of seeing the possibilities for good that lie in instruments and agencies of evil. There is little, if anything, that was meant to be "cast as rubbish to the void." The rubbish has but to be reclaimed and transformed, and it will find its place in the new and better world.

One of life's greatest tasks is just to turn the spear into the pruning-hook. Everywhere, round about us and within us, are forces that threaten to destroy us. It is not always wise, or even possible, for us to destroy them. But we have to transform them, and compel the deadly things to bless us. The passions and the appetites which too often plunge life into confusion, and sometimes into ruin, cannot be exterminated; in some form, wilder or more subdued, we shall carry them with us to our graves. They cannot be destroyed, for by them, in a measure, the world continues. But as we love our lives, we shall have to take very good care that we do not allow them to destroy us. It is a sad day when we deliberately beat the pruning-hook

into a spear. How hateful a thing, for example, is passion! but how beautiful is love! They may seem to the cynic not to lie far apart; but like the spear and the pruning-hook, they belong to different worlds. The one carries waste and desolation in its train, and wraps the life in a horror of great darkness; the other floods it with gladness and peace.

All our gifts and capacities are as so many weapons which may be deadly or beneficent according as we let them. What a cruel instrument the spoken or the written word has often been—sharper than any two-edged sword. It has been used to stab reputations, and it has torn many a sensitive heart. It has been used to distort the truth, and to poison the imagination. When we think of all the gratuitous sorrow that has been caused by flippant or caustic reviews, by cold and cynical estimates of men and things, it is hard to see how men could expect to further the cause of truth or good-will by such an exercise of their powers. It is easy for an able man to coin a stinging epigram or to write a clever paragraph which will leave a wound upon the soul of his victim that will not be healed after many days. Yes, it is easy; but in a world where there is so much nobler work to do, is it worth while? If the pen that was charged with malice and satire will learn to trace words that will help and encourage,

the cause of truth will not suffer, and we shall be a little nearer the golden days of which we dream.

Undoubtedly one of the most powerful weapons in the world for good or evil is education. Often, indeed, the claim is made for it that it is a good thing in itself; but it is in reality a neutral instrument which may be employed by the man who possesses it either for the blessing or the bane of society. The man with the ample knowledge and the trained mind has it in his power to do more mischief, should he be so inclined, than one whose resources and training are more limited. His instruments are more numerous, and they have a finer edge; if he be selfish and unscrupulous, he can use them to deadlier purpose. They will be in his hands spears and not pruning-hooks. It is therefore of the very first importance that, from the beginning, a moral and religious atmosphere be thrown about the education of a child. Knowledge alone will never make him a good man or a benefactor of society. He must have not only his mind but his affections cultivated, and his heart set upon whatsoever things are honourable and of good report; so that when the time comes for him to step into his share of the world's work, he will use any power that he has won in the years of preparation, for the good of the society in which his lot is cast.

It is clear, therefore, that there lies upon those who have the high task of training the young—

whether in home or school, in church or college—a very solemn responsibility. They must see to it that the weapons they are daily helping to forge, will turn out in the end not spears but pruning-hooks. The process of education ought to be tempered at every stage by influences of morality and religion. It has to be sorrowfully confessed that this has often been forgotten in schemes of practical education, though there is happily a change for the better to-day. As an element in education, morality has frequently been ignored and sometimes even been flouted. Some of the foreign literature which scholarly young men are expected to study at the universities, does not always exactly make for a high morality; and we do not strictly enough control the novels which our young people too easily secure from circulating libraries and devour with avidity at an age when their minds and imaginations are susceptible to impressions of every kind. We must most zealously guard against all educational influences which tend to

"Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage of the
sewer,
Send the drain into the fountain, lest the stream should issue
pure ;
Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism,—
Forward, forward, ay and backward, downward too, into the
abysm."

The nemesis of such an education is sure. The

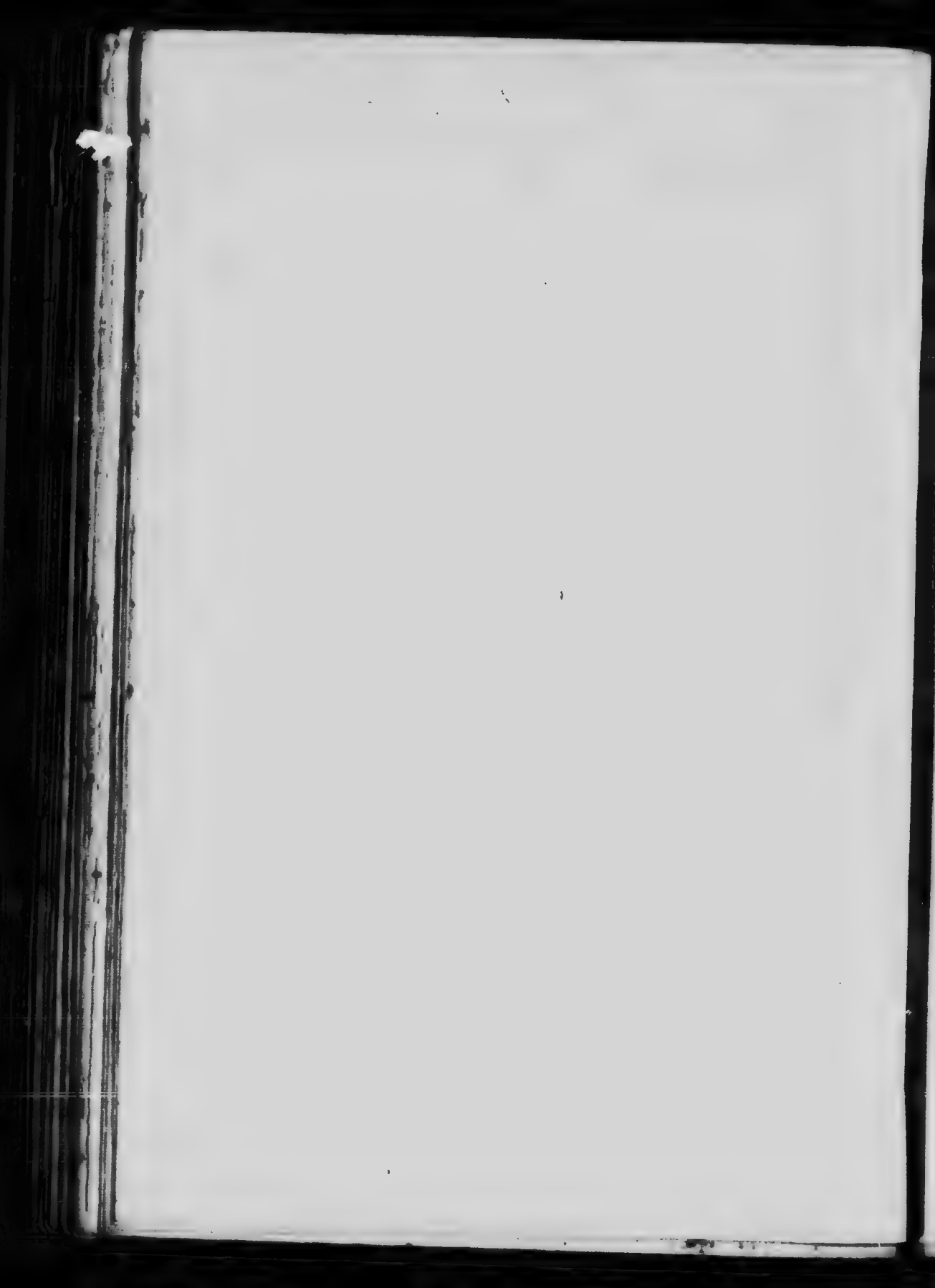
mind which is filled with knowledge but emptied of moral interests, the imagination which is corrupted in its youth by the vision of things degrading, is an abiding menace to the individual's inner peace and also to the welfare of society. The weapon must be shaped into a pruning-hook and not into a spear; the world has already seen enough of confusion and death.

It is easier to make of the metal a pruning-hook at once than to make the pruning-hook out of a spear. But if the spear has already been made, the transformation only comes after it has been beaten with many blows. They shall "beat" their spears into pruning-hooks; if the wrong instrument has been made to begin with, then the process of transformation will require hard work. But men whose views of the world have been transformed, will not be long in setting to the task of transforming their old weapons into instruments of blessing. The new man will be ready and glad to take his part in ushering in the new world. The warriors whom the prophet saw in imagination go to Zion to have their causes settled there by arbitration, have determined to practise the art of war no more; and it does one's heart good to watch the energy with which, when they come back, they deal their lusty blows upon the cruel swords and spears. The love of peace is now in their hearts; they see visions of ploughed fields and gracious

hillsides, and they beat their spears into pruning-hooks for the new world to be.

And all this, says the prophet, is to take place in the latter days. Why not to-day? If only we learn to care more for the pruning-hook than the spear; if only we prefer peace to strife, and so shape our life as to promote good will among men; if only we refuse to destroy our material, but with a sharp eye for its possibilities, hold ourselves ever ready to transform it; then the consummation which the prophet projected into the latter days, may indeed be very near.

A LESSON IN CONTRASTS



A LESSON IN CONTRASTS

"While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease."

THERE is much consolation in the ancient assurance that "while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." These words suggest that the order established in nature by God is fixed and constant, and that men may rely on it for ever. But the words suggest more than that. They suggest that this order which is as reliable as God Himself is yet an order which is full of contrasts: in it there is a place for summer and winter both, for cold and heat, for day and night. It is not a perpetual summer or an unbroken day that God has established, but a summer followed by winter, a day succeeded by night. In the divine order there is no monotony, there is variety and contrast; and while the earth remaineth, these contrasts shall never cease.

Such is the way of God in nature, and such, too, is His way in human life. We might wish it other-

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wise : most of us—the young at least—would think life to be so much richer and fairer, if it were one long unbroken summer and a cloudless day. But it is not so. No life is so. In human life, as in nature, the winter comes as surely as the summer, and the night is as certain as the day. While the earth remaineth, winter and cold and night shall not cease.

To recognize calmly the inevitableness of these contrasts and the certainty of their recurrence, is more than half the art of life. The man who quietly faces this great fact will be prepared for any kind of experience that may come to him, and will know how to carry himself within it. He will never allow himself to be either unduly exalted or immoderately depressed. In his prosperity he will remember the evil day, and in his adversity he will not lose heart. When he stands, he will remember that he may fall : when he falls, he will not be utterly cast down. In summer he will remember that the winter is coming : in the gloom of winter he will comfort his heart with the thought of the warmth and light of the summers that were and that yet will be.

This is to see life steadily and see it whole. We cannot see it steadily unless we see it whole. All experience is blended of bitter and sweet. The gladdest life is not all joy, nor is the saddest all sorrow. "All our joy is touched with pain"—shadows fall on brightest hours, and thorns remain.

And it is just as true that all our pain may be soothed by the hope of joy to be; for if summer is followed by winter, no less surely does "every winter change to spring."

"Time, so complain'd of,
Who to no one man
Shows partiality,
Brings round to all men
Some undimm'd hours."

It is right to throw ourselves into our happy experiences, if they be honourable, with heart and soul: but even our happiest moods cannot but be touched with solemnity, when we think how precarious it all is, and how surely the situation will be one day transformed.

So also, when the black night falls about us, we do well to remember that no night, however long, can last for ever. The night will pass and the morning will come. While the earth remaineth, men may depend upon the day no less than upon the night. To one who has learned to look upon life as a succession of contrasts, no great surprise can come. He knows that change is inevitable, and he is always inwardly prepared for it. He sees beyond the immediate experience to that with which it will one day be contrasted; and, alike in joy and sorrow, he preserves the steady heart and the quiet mind—for he knows that neither can last for ever. The changes that are sure to come he does not fear

to see; for, in silent communion with his own heart, he has already faced them all.

The most certain thing about every life, however bright or dark the immediate outlook may be, is that its experience will be checkered. It will be neither all bright nor all dark. There will be shadow as well as light, light as well as shadow. When we look the facts in the face, do we not see how surely the dearest joys of our life will one day—if not for us, then for those whom we love—be changed into sorrow? Every birth means a death, every friendship means a parting. Where two are dear to each other, nothing is more certain than that some day one will be taken and the other left. As the bridegroom stands with his bride before the altar, and the future seems so fair, the words "Till death us do part" fall upon the heart as a solemn and almost chilling reminder of the infinite pathos that is woven through all our earthly happiness.

This is not a gospel of pessimism, nor a message which affronts the Christian consciousness. It is but the simple recognition of an indubitable fact, which is not incompatible with a deep and silent joy that, in His own mysterious way, God doeth all things well. It is but a reading of life which springs from what has been called the "spirit which insists on hearing the other side." The summer comes, and after that the winter.

But the truth of life's contrasts is double-edged.

As it touches our joy with solemnity, so it should temper our sorrow with consolation and hope. There are terrible hours in most lives, when we stand before an open grave, and the heart knoweth its own bitterness and desolation. Life can never be the same again, when those with whom we have taken sweet counsel together are lost to our earthly eyes. And yet God has so mercifully ordained our human nature that, even throughout the lonely years, life can be not only endured, but earnestly, gratefully, and even gladly lived. Those who have gone before are transfigured by the kindly touch of death: as the years go by, we can think of them more quietly as at home with God. And other blessings enter into our lives, in the shape of new friendships and tasks, which bring us, not indeed the joy we buried in the grave—that is impossible—but other joys; so, though weeping may endure for a night, at length joy cometh in the morning. The wise man is he who prepares himself for life's contrasts, for it must needs be that contrasts come. Summer and winter, cold and heat, day and night, joy and sorrow, shall not cease.

And this will be true, while the earth remaineth. In that other world, which can only be reached through the portals of death, we have reason to believe it will be otherwise. There His servants will serve Him, but not, we believe, amid experiences of alternating joy and sorrow. They shall

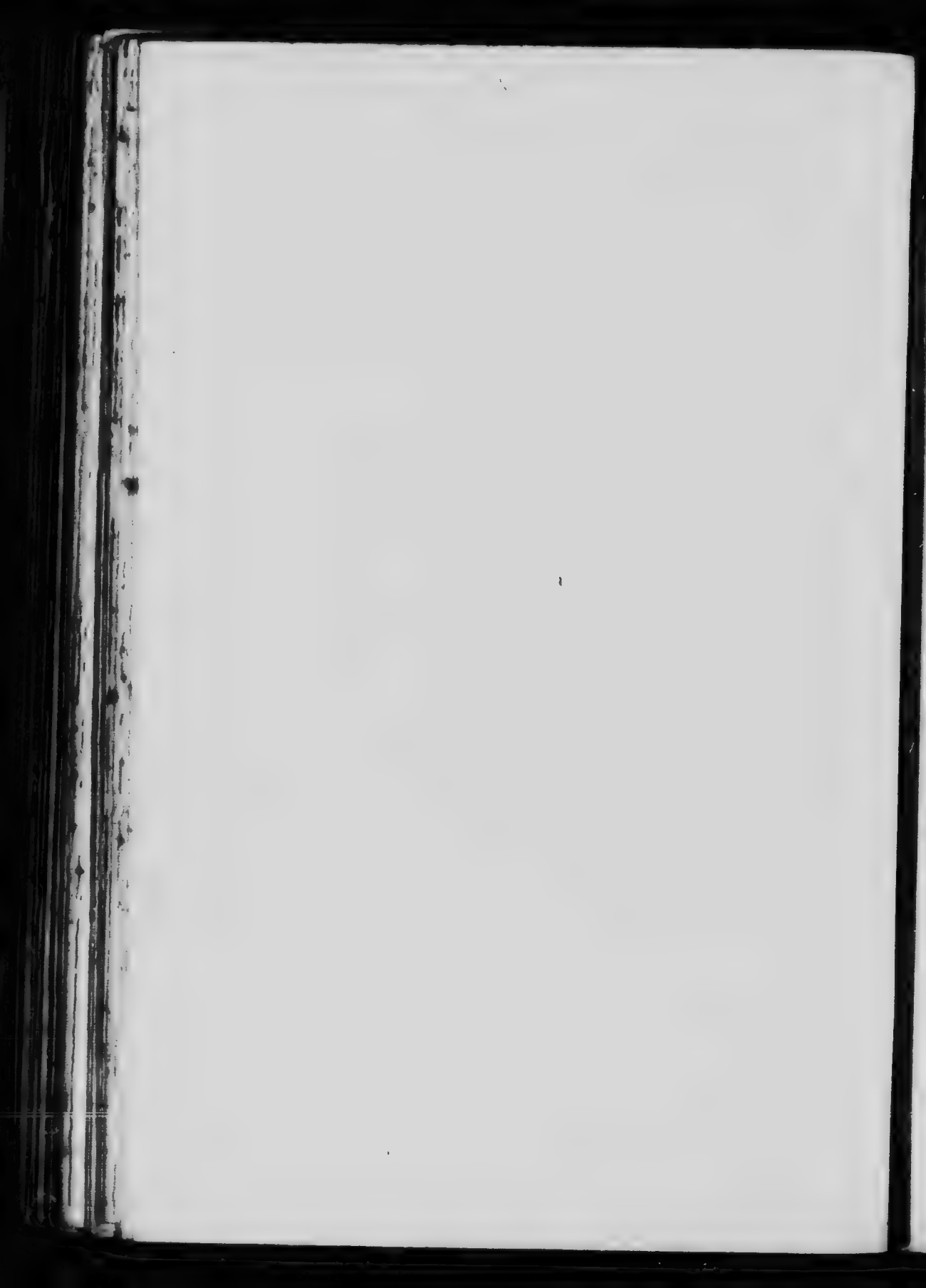
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go on from strength to strength, and do their happy work in the full light of eternal day. The words of holy scripture and the instincts of our hearts alike assure us that there shall be no night there. But, while we are here, we must take life as we find it, with its strange but inevitable contrasts—not too much exalted by its joys nor too much cast down by its sorrows. Let us not forget that every day must end in night; but, when the night has fallen, let us be patient and hopeful, as they that watch for the morning.

"Heaven overarches you and me,
And all earth's gardens and her graves.
Look up with me, until we see
The day break and the shadows flee."

THE CONSOLATIONS OF NATURE

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THE CONSOLATIONS OF NATURE

"He causes it to rain on a land where no man is"

WOULD any one seriously think of sending a broken-hearted man to nature for consolation? Her great Titanic processes go on, grandly indifferent to human misery. She speaks indeed with a majestic voice; but it is for an accent more personal and human that we yearn, when our hearts are sore. She cannot speak to us the word we need, or at least we have not ears to hear.

Is it not, then, all the more strange that a book which is among the greatest, and perhaps the very greatest in the world, should deliberately send its sorely tried hero to nature for the healing of his sorrow? Job had mysteriously suffered. For no reason that he knew, he had been stripped of almost all that he loved, and left with nothing that he could call his own but a loathsome and incurable disease which made life intolerable and death welcome.

His friends come to comfort him. They offer him the best that men can offer, into whose own soul the iron has not yet entered—conventional con-

solation and good advice. Naturally, to their perplexed and desperate friend, their words are but platitudes, cruel and irrelevant, which in his honest indignation he contemptuously rejects. But besides these earthly friends, with their well-meant but superficial explanations of his misery, he has a Friend in the heavens who, he feels sure, will understand and vindicate him; and to Him he appeals. But with Job the tragedy is, as it so often is, that the unseen Friend remains unseen, and he is left alone in the universe with a sense of indescribable desolation. Then he solemnly and elaborately protests his innocence, and makes his last supreme appeal to the Almighty. If only *He* would appear, then in the proud consciousness of his integrity,

"I would declare unto Him the number of my steps;
As a prince would I approach Him."

This time his prayer is heard. The Almighty answers him out of the whirlwind. But what an answer! Not a syllable about Job or his sorrow, not a word that acknowledges his integrity or commends his patience, not a ray of light upon the particular grief that is breaking his indignant heart, not a solitary allusion to the problems of the moral world that have been discussed with such vehemence by him and his friends, not a hint of another world in which the wrongs of this will be righted and its sorrows comforted for evermore. Instead of the consolation and the vindication with which he had dreamed his heavenly Friend would soothe

his wounded heart, there is hurled out of the whirlwind a volley of ironical questions which have nothing to do with him or his grief, nor even with human life at all, but which gather around the mysterious processes of nature—the steadiness of the earth, the movement of the sea, the invisible sources of the snow, the rain, the hail.

"Gird up now thy loins like a man ;
For I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.
Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth ?
Declare, if thou hast understanding."

It seems cruel of the great Friend thus to overwhelm the broken-hearted man who had appealed to Him so confidently. What does it all mean ?

For one thing, it means that, in perplexity or sorrow, it is good for us to get away from ourselves—"to forget ourselves," as one has said, "in the glorious creation of which we form a part." Job desperately appeals to God for a revelation of Himself and for light upon his misery ; and, for answer, God passes before him the splendid panorama of creation—of earth, and sky, and sea, with the wild and happy things that are therein. To a broken heart, such an answer may seem a very mockery ; but it is God's own answer, and it means, at the least, that so long as we have eyes for nothing but our problems, the problems will remain. If we do not solve them, we can at least forget them, by looking away to the wonders of the immeasurable universe.

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The first feeling that comes upon us as we look, is a sense of overwhelming mystery. Job has no answer to give to any of the questions that fall upon his terrified ears. He does not know where the light dwells. He does not know where God keeps His treasures of snow and hail. He does not really know anything of the wonderful world about him. Nor do we. We have watched the great processes, and given them names, and spoken of cause and effect, of the conservation of force, and the transformation of energy; but, in the last resort, we are as ignorant as Job. "Behold, we know not anything." We are not in the secret counsels of the Almighty any more than he.

The world is a mystery which we have to accept without being able to explain; and this was doubtless one of the lessons which the panorama of nature was designed to bring home to the desolate soul of Job. Mystery, mystery, on the right hand and on the left! If he could not answer the simplest questions that could be asked about the familiar phenomena of the natural world, how could he hope to understand the infinitely more intricate problems that gather about the moral world and human life? Our problem, frightful as it is when looked at by itself, shrivels almost into insignificance, when seen against that background of infinite mystery. Ours is but a little bit of the mystery in which the whole universe is enwrapped, and before which it is wisdom to bow in silence.

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This were, however, after all, but a melancholy consolation--resignation rather than consolation; and the glorious vision of nature can do more for the sorrowful heart than that. The majestic speech of the Almighty, which suggests that the universe is a mystery, suggests also that it is an orderly mystery. Behind it is Mind. Its phenomena do not happen in any order, they happen in a particular order; their sequence can be depended upon. Its God is a God of order, not of confusion. Through the centuries this order has run inexorably on--seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, cold and heat, day and night--and this will continue while the earth remaineth.

In spite of the mystery that baffles and besets us behind and before, the world of which we form a part is a world in which things are in their places. The sea and the land have each their bounds assigned them.

"Who shut up the sea with doors,
And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further,
And here shall thy proud waves be stayed?"

The sea is not allowed to overwhelm and devastate the land. In the physical world things are where they should be, and will it not also be so in the world of human life? Sorrow has its place, like the sea, but no more than the sea will it be allowed to work wreck and ruin. "Thus far shalt thou come, but no further."

The world we live in is therefore a world whose

order we have a right to trust. It is full of meaning and purpose. And as we watch the unfailing regularity with which its great processes go on; as we think of the Mind by which they are directed, and the unwearied everlasting arms upon which they are sustained, we too shall find something of that quiet order, which pervades the universe, enter and take possession of our own souls, as we begin to trust that infinite Mind and to lean with all our weight upon those mighty arms.

But in the mystery by which we are surrounded there is more than order; there is love. The system of things is not cruel or indifferent; it is an order at the heart of which is love. Surely this thought was never expressed with more tenderness or beauty than in the lines—

“He causes it to rain on a land where no man is;
On the wilderness, wherein there is no man;
To satisfy the waste and desolate ground,
And to cause the tender grass to spring forth.”

The God who lavishes His love even upon the desolate and waste ground, will surely not forget His men and women with their waste and desolated hearts. The great poet who gave us this immortal book does not actually say so, indeed he deliberately avoids saying so—for in these speeches he persistently keeps our eyes turned away from human life and its problems—but that is what he means. If God cares for the wilderness, will He not also care for the man? If He pours His love

even upon the place *where no man is*, He can surely be trusted to remember the places where the men are. It is the Old Testament anticipation of the words of Jesus: "If God so clothe the grass of the field, shall He not much more clothe you?" As has been well said, the solution offered here is one "which does not solve the perplexity, but buries it under the tide of a fuller life and joy in God."

Even this ancient poet, who very keenly felt the mystery that lies about the world and human life, yet learned from nature that it was not an unilluminated mystery—that it was lit up by the love of God. He saw that love shining in the most unlikely places, and he had faith to believe that it shines always and everywhere, whether men have eyes to see it or not. We do not always see it plainly; but we see Jesus, we know Him and what He is; and the Mind that is behind the universe is the same mind that was in Him. Could we trust Him? Surely. Then no less surely may we trust It. The mystery of life is not indeed thereby abolished, but it is illuminated. It can be faced with quietness and confidence; for behind it is that Love which

"Causes it to rain upon the wilderness where no man is,
To satisfy the waste and desolate ground."

COURAGE, CHILD

COURAGE, CHILD

"Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Courage, child'"

OF all the words of grace that proceeded out of the mouth of Jesus, few are more precious than those which He spoke to the man that was sick of the palsy. There the unhappy man lay, stretched upon his couch, sick at heart, and weak in body, a burden alike to himself and to his friends, unable to move unless they chose to move him. For him the future could be but one long stretch of misery. There was only one hope: if Jesus could but see him and touch him—the wonderful Jesus, who had already shown such strange love for sick folk and such mysterious power over the diseases that vexed them—perhaps he might yet be made well again. It may be that the man himself had no hope; but his friends hoped for him, and earnest friendship availeth much. They were in deadly earnest: and, though under the circumstances a meeting with Jesus was hard to secure—for the place was crowded to the door and He was preaching—they yet contrived, with an ingenuity sharpened by affection, to bring their helpless friend right into the presence of Jesus.

What a contrast between the serene and simple majesty of the great Speaker and the helpless misery of the man before Him. If his physical trouble was due to his sin—and that seems to be implied by the story—how abashed he must have felt before the pure gaze of Jesus, as those eyes looked into the depths of his soul. What will Jesus say? It is a great moment, as these two men silently confront each other, the living embodiment of Helplessness and Power. The eyes of all are riveted on Jesus—the people with curious expectancy, the four friends with beating hearts and desperate hopes, the scribes with a scowl upon their faces and hate in their hearts.

What will Jesus say? He was deeply cheered by the faith the friends had shown, and He would not let such faith go away disappointed. So, turning to the helpless man upon the couch, He said, "Courage, child." He said more, but He began by saying that. And we can imagine how these two simple words, each in its own way, began to touch the springs of life and hope in the wasted body before Him. The man, if a great sinner, may have been accustomed to words of reproach, or to that cold and shallow consolation which stings more keenly than reproach; and now he is told to take heart again. Here is One who speaks to him as if He believed in the possibility of his physical and spiritual recovery, One who appeals to his

slumbering hope and heroism. And so tender an appeal, too! He calls him "child." Many a year had passed since he had been anybody's "child"; and the tenderness of the speaker, no less than His first great, authoritative word, goes to the heart of the unhappy man. His inner world is transformed; a new life courses through his veins, and it will not be long till he will be upon his feet, and going upon his way rejoicing. In the presence of this mysterious One, who speaks to him hopefully, who bids him be brave, who assures him of the forgiveness of sins, and who calls him Child, old things are passed away, and a new day has dawned.

Doubtless this was one of the favourite words of Jesus. When the woman who had been ill twelve years fell trembling at His feet, after touching the hem of His garment, He reassured her with the words, "Courage, daughter." When the disciples, after a tempestuous night, were terrified by what seemed like a spectral figure moving towards them over the waves, their fears were met by a familiar voice, "Courage, it is I: do not be afraid." And, when by their Master's death, those same disciples were to be launched upon a still more stormy sea, His parting message to them was the same: "Courage: as for Me, I have conquered the world." And this was the message with which He still continued to brace and visit men, after He had risen

from the dead. When His servant Paul was in danger of being torn to pieces by a fanatical mob, from whose hands he was only rescued by the forcible intervention of Roman soldiers, "the following night the Lord stood by him, and said, Courage"; and the intrepid career of Paul is the proof that His Master's call to courage kept for ever ringing in his heart. He knew well that the fierce activities and persecutions of his missionary life were killing him, and once and again, on sea and on the land, he had been 'face to face with death. "Nevertheless," he says, "we are courageous at all times; yes, we are courageous, I say"—twice over—"and well pleased to leave our home in the body, and to go away to be at home with the Lord." Death had no terror for this man, he faced it with good courage; for it but took him into the nearer presence of his Lord.

These experiences, sickness and sorrow, anxiety and death, lie before us all; and in them how can we be better cheered and heartened than just by the kindly word of Jesus, "Courage, child." In our gospels, as we now have them, the words were first spoken to a weak man and to a sick woman. Such we have always with us; and to the world's weak and sick folk those are the words of Jesus for ever. "Courage," He said to those who were tossed upon the sea; and still He says "Courage" to all who are tossed, to all who are sailing through a black and

stormy night, made more awful by the presence of spectres. The spectre which strikes a chill into our hearts is but Himself disguised by the mists. "It is I," He says; and the moment we are sure of this, we may well take heart again. "Courage, it is I, do not be afraid."

Yes, we are discouraged by a hundred things—by the agony of a prolonged sickness, by the brutality of competition, by the sense of our own failure, by the sudden uprush of the storm into our quiet life, by the desolation of bereavement, by the fear of death. In hours like these we need some one who will call us "Child," and put heart in us again. And who can do this like Jesus? He who so gently bids us be brave has Himself been in the thickest of the fight. All of weakness and sorrow that life has to yield, He has Himself been through, and more. Hunger, disappointment, temptation, misunderstanding, treachery, death—He knows it all: for us He faced it all, and came back victorious. "I have overcome the world." It is One who has Himself conquered the world who bids us take courage, and who has such a right to bid us as He? It is His word, far more than any other word that ever fell from human lips, that puts us in good heart again. It is through fellowship with Him that His courage passes into us, and the victory that was His will be ours.

Courage, then, for God is good. Courage, for

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Jesus is with us on the sick bed, and with us in the storm. Courage, for He overcame, and we shall overcome in Him.

He was brave as He was gentle, and gentle as He was brave. He is touched for evermore with a feeling of our infirmities; and while He appeals to our latent heroism, He yet deals with us as little children. Many a gracious word of His rises to our hearts as we think of Him; but with especial gratitude do we remember Him for this brave and gentle word. And in every hour of pain or fear or desolation may we have grace given us to hear that dear voice saying to our troubled hearts, "Courage, child."

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**THE LAW THAT CANNOT
BE BROKEN**

THE LAW THAT CANNOT BE BROKEN

"Teach me Thy law"

THE splendid gains of civilization have been accompanied by tragic and pathetic losses. To-day life is interesting as it never has been before. By the railway, the steamboat, the telegraph, the newspaper, the whole world is welded into a common brotherhood; and the man in New York is not content unless he knows something of what the men in Tokio are doing. Assuredly modern life is interesting—but it is not quiet. It interests the mind, but it does not rest the spirit. Perhaps there never has been so much noise in the world as there is to-day; certainly the stress and strain of life were never before spread over so wide an area. The result is that many—and these not the weakest and the worst, but often the strongest and the best—are fainting beneath their burdens.

There are some who, humanly speaking, cannot help themselves. There are others whose physical ruin is, in large measure, their own fault. If they can fairly be called victims at all, they are the victims of their own good nature or stupidity. The malady known as nervous prostration is appallingly

common. It attacks the strong, robust, and eager man, as well as the nervous and susceptible woman ; but no one who has watched the unhappy victims of its assaults can deny that it attacks many who ought to have been impervious to its attacks, had they used the common sense which God has given them, or availed themselves of the opportunities for rest, refreshment, and recreation, which in many cases were scattered plentifully enough about their lives. It almost looks as if the unhappy sufferers had deliberately aimed to place themselves in the position in which they now are, and had cultivated nervous prostration as if it had been a fine art.

Of course the statement has only to be put thus baldly for the absurdity of it to be self-evident. The disease is a ghastly one. In its power to dull the intellect, to paralyze the moral energies, to cripple the spiritual power, to darken the outlook upon life and God, to envelop the spirit with gloom, and to inspire the sufferer with morbid and suicidal thoughts, it is an affliction from which the bravest might well shrink back in terror. But, at the same time, many a man, and perhaps still more, many a woman, lives as if he or she were positively courting its oncoming. They do—sometimes, indeed, thoughtlessly, but often enough deliberately, and with their eyes fully open to all the horrible possibilities—the very things which are bound, in the long run, to reduce them to physical wrecks.

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For a man has not lived to much purpose if he has not learned that all life is governed by laws, and that his health and usefulness depend upon obedience to those laws. It matters not what the reason for the disobedience may be; often the sin may seem venial enough. But disobedience must be punished, and the wages of sin is prostration, and often death. Many men burden themselves with unnecessary duties. Imagining themselves to be indispensable to a certain piece of work, they willfully refuse to avail themselves of the useful help which could easily be had, and work on single-handed or with inadequate assistance until their own power of work is ruined. Then they learn, what they ought to have known all the time, that they were not indispensable. Women yield to the exacting demands of a too frivolous society, thinking that they can only refuse those demands on the penalty of social extinction; and then the nervous affections creep insidiously on, till the woman is a wreck, and the social extinction which she dreaded, and to avoid which she sacrificed everything, becomes a fact.

But perhaps the saddest thing of all is that so many men allow themselves to be misled by their own good nature. It may be that a man can do three or four things well. He is a good preacher, a good platform speaker, a good writer. Were he only any one of these, he would have his hands full

enough, but, as it is, he is assailed on three different sides. The assailants, representing, as they do, different interests, do not know how cruel they are; all they know is that they are asking a capable man to do what they know he can do. It is a situation like this that tests a man's real wisdom and insight. In a weak moment, and for want of the power to say "No," he may accept engagements which he can only fulfil through the ultimate ruin of his own physical, and perhaps mental, strength; and one may be pardoned for doubting whether, under ordinary circumstances, and unless there be some great claim to be greatly met, God demands such a sacrifice as that.

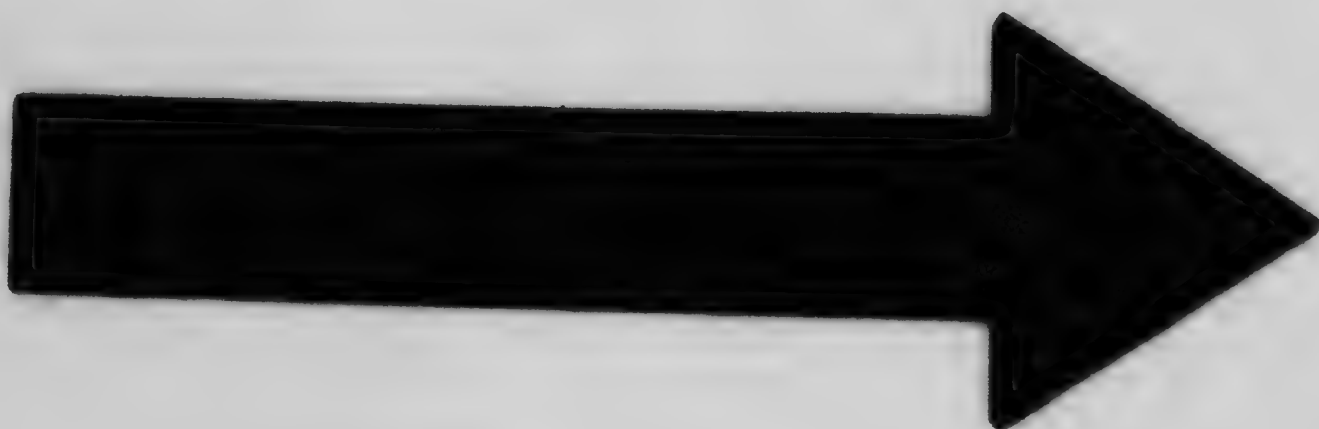
Even in the interests of the work itself the man must learn to say "No," because he does that work a gross injustice—the greatest injustice he as an individual can do it—by putting himself deliberately in the position of being ultimately unable to do it. The loss of a good worker is the most serious loss which a great cause can sustain, and that loss is inevitable if the worker commits the folly of working beyond his strength. And it is precisely the best workers who are most exposed to this temptation, for it is upon them, very naturally, that the world lays its heaviest and most numerous demands.

But the laws of health are the laws of God. The sooner we learn that if a man has the hardihood to defy the laws of God, it is he who suffers, and

THE LAW THAT CANNOT BE BROKEN 169

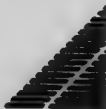
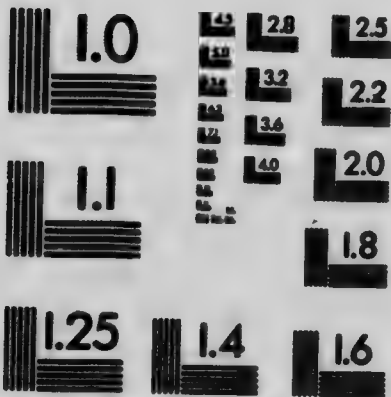
not they, the better it will be for us all. We pray glibly for a revelation from God, and here is one of the plainest and most undeniable revelations that man can ever hope to receive. Yet every month Christian men defy it repeatedly and deliberately. How can we hope to be happy if we defy the great and beneficent laws of God? Is it fair that we should be happy? The way of transgressors is hard, and the man or woman who needlessly overworks is a transgressor, and just as sure of punishment as any other transgressor. It is easier to run down than to run up. It is months, and often years, before the victim of nervous prostration recovers that elasticity and buoyancy of spirit which constitutes more than half the happiness of life. It is a fearful thing to fall into the arms of these mighty laws of God. Every Sabbath day is a reminder of the folly, indeed of the crime, of overwork. The man who refuses to avail himself of his proper rest and recreation is indeed a bold man; he is defying the established order of the world, violating the constitution of his own being, and dashing himself against the laws of God. But in such a collision we may be very sure that it is he, and not they, that will be broken in pieces.

**CHRIST'S CARE FOR THE
FRAGMENTS**



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APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5999 - Fax

CHRIST'S CARE FOR THE FRAGMENTS

"Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost"

LIKE all great things, the gospel of Jesus is too large to imprison within the walls of a definition; but if it is to be defined at all, it could not be defined more simply or justly than as "care for the fragments." Everywhere throughout His ministry, everywhere throughout the Gospels, shines His interest in the broken things of life. They interested Him, because they vexed Him; and they vexed Him because they were missing their high destiny. Fragments are failures, and it was the mission and the delight of the Divine Artist to gather them together and bind them into a complete and beautiful whole.

And so it would not be unjust to find the motto of the life of Jesus in the words He addressed to His disciples after the feeding of the five thousand—"Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." These words, slight as they seem, and humble as was the sphere to which they were first applied, are as a window through which we may look into the gracious soul of Jesus. They

are not random words; they are words that rose from the very bottom of His heart, revealing the depths of its tenderness and the impulse of His entire ministry. Spoken first of fragments of bread, they are symbolic of His consuming and undying interest in fragments of every kind—of time, of manhood, of every broken thing.

Very wonderful is this whole scene, and most wonderful of all is Jesus. The vast, hungry crowd is gathered in a spot, not far from the lakeside, where there was much grass. Jesus faces the crowd, and here, as everywhere, He is the Master. Gracious as He is, He is every inch a King. He speaks as one having authority, and at once the movement and confusion of the crowd change to order and beauty. They recline in companies upon the green grass, and, with a true eye for the picturesque, Mark—or his informant—compares them, as they lay, with the brilliant colours of their dresses showing up against the grass, to flower beds. It is a happy picture; a touching one, too, when we think of the sore and troubled hearts that beat beneath many a coloured robe. It is a blessed thing to see the poetry as well as the pathos of such a crowd.

But all was not over when the feast was done. The greatest thing was yet to come, and Jesus was yet to utter one of His most memorable words. There were broken pieces left, enough to satisfy

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other hungry men, and these must not be carelessly wasted. There were possibilities in the fragments which none saw but Jesus. The crowd had appeased its hunger and thought of nothing more, and it would seem that the disciples thought no more of the fragments than did the crowd. Nobody saw their value but Jesus; so, "when the people were satisfied, Jesus said to His disciples, 'Gather up the fragments—the broken pieces—that remain, that nothing be lost.'" One might have been tempted to marvel at what seems the almost too rigid economy of Jesus. Why so much interest in fragments of bread? How could they ever serve again? But the marvel dies away the moment we consider the reason, for though Jesus is always authoritative, He is always reasonable. "Gather up the fragments," He says, "in order that not a thing may perish." The word here is the same as that used of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son.

The world is full of fragments, and that must not be, says Jesus; let them be gathered up. All about us men and things are perishing, and that must not be, says Jesus; let nothing perish. He is the true Son of the God of whom it is said that He doth not wish that any should perish.

"That not a thing should perish"—it was of fragments of bread that Jesus spoke those earnest words; but they illumine not that incident alone,

but the whole of His ministry from the baptism to the cross, and He wrote them literally on the pages of history with His heart's blood. Nothing vexed Him so much as to see things perishing; it was for their sake He came. "The Son of Man," He said, speaking of Himself, "came to seek and to save that which was lost"—and the word is the same as that here used for the fragments of bread. To Him the fragments were the most interesting things in all the world; and His command to His disciples was then, and is now, that they too should care for the fragments.

This care for the fragments has a hundred applications in the life of Jesus. The fragments of time to Him were very precious, and He did not wish that any should perish. The day was long enough—for were there not twelve hours in it?—but it was not too long, and there were not too many of them in which to do His Father's business. Therefore He gathered up its every fragment and filled it full of work or rest or prayer; for He never forgot that the night was coming when men work no more.

Beautiful, too, is the interest of Jesus in the ancient fragments of revelation. He knew that His Father had spoken to men in the olden time; and He treasured those fragments of psalm and wisdom and prophecy and gathered them together upon Himself. He came not to destroy those relics of the past, but to fulfil, to complete, to illumine their

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fragmentary suggestions, that nothing might be lost.

But dearest of all to Jesus were the broken lives of men; and here, if anywhere, was the passion of His heart that nothing might be lost. The world was full of such fragments; but Jesus was the first to see how very precious they were, and how much could be done with them. The womanhood that had been shattered by sin He restored to conscience and honour by the purity of His mighty love, so that the sinner who had been but too well known in the city was touched to tears by the sight of Him, and in a penitent burst of pure and grateful devotion, fervently kissed His feet. Thus, by the magic of Christ's love, was many a fragment of fallen nature gathered up and tenderly put together again. Love and insight went together—love for the fragments, insight into their possibilities. His ministry was a continual gathering and restitution of the broken pieces. "Jehovah doth build up Jerusalem; He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel." It is a Christlike thing to care for the fragments. Every life that is broken—whether by poverty or disease, by folly or ignorance, by sin or sorrow, by crime or misfortune—is another call to arise and do as did the Master, who loved the fragments and gave His life that they might be made whole.

This great word of Jesus is as applicable to the little things of life as to the great. Fragments of

time, of strength and of knowledge are squandered and lost just as surely as fragments of character, and all for want of taking to heart the Master's simple word. The motto of our life should be the motto of His, "That not a thing be lost." If any useful thing that belongs to us perish, we are so much the poorer, so much the worse equipped for the work which is given to us to do.

How then shall we save the fragments from perishing? "Gather them up," says Jesus; or more literally and appropriately, "Gather them together"—for the Greek word means precisely that. The fragments are impotent, so long as they are apart; but bring them together, and see what wonders they will work. One broken piece of bread will do little to satisfy a hungry man, but twenty such pieces would go a long way.

So it is with all our scattered and fragmentary resources. Every man is meeting every day with facts and statements of which it would be worth his while to have a permanent and accessible record. But we trust to our memories—those unhappy sieve-like memories—and the precious facts filter through and disappear. Or if, in a sudden access of wisdom, we record them, we do so without system; the records are loose, scattered or misplaced, and when they are wanted, they cannot be found, simply because they were not gathered together. Our resources are in many cases extensive enough. but

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they are too often useless in the hour of necessity, because they are not concentrated. The records are here and there and everywhere, and thus their cumulative effect is lost. They are practically impotent, because they are fragmentary. Would it not then be common prudence in these matters, as in all matters, to listen to the words of Jesus to His disciples, "Gather together the fragments, that nothing perish"?

And then there is the surprise of the accumulated fragments. For we read that when the disciples had gathered as the Master had bidden them, they took up twelve baskets full. To those who gather the fragments there may be but seven baskets, or there may be twelve; but one thing is certain, that there will be more, far more, than ever they had dared to expect. The possibilities of the fragments are infinite, and a glad surprise awaits the man who has the wisdom to gather them together. He is richer than he knows. It may be but the odd moments of a day; but thirty minutes saved a day would yield over seven days in the year, and in seven continuous days a man who knows his own mind may do or learn much. Insight into the value of the fragments and will to gather them together—this is largely the art of life, and, in its widest application, constitutes the gospel of Jesus. The man who will gather his sheaves together will doubtless come again with joy.

JUSTIFICATION BY WORDS

JUSTIFICATION BY WORDS

"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"

MANY a battle royal has been fought over the doctrines of justification: by faith and justification by works, but perhaps we have heard less than we ought about justification by words. It is not an apostle, but the Master Himself, who urges the too much neglected truth that men are justified by their words.

This great utterance of Jesus was called forth by the malevolent criticism of the Pharisees. He had just performed a great healing miracle which had astonished the assembled crowds, and convinced them that He was the Messiah. The spiteful Pharisees have another explanation. He casts out demons, they said, by the prince of the demons. They do not and dare not deny the fact, but they explain it by asserting that He is in league with the powers of evil. And nothing could have troubled Jesus more than this, that men should look upon His beautiful and gracious deed and deliberately pronounce it the work of the Devil. Men who

could do that were not only lost to all sense of honour, but were devoid of moral sensibilities. Their world was turned upside down. They were the sworn foes of beneficence. They called good evil, and evil good. No words, therefore, were too severe to characterize their moral brutality, and our consciences instinctively acknowledge the justice of this great utterance of Jesus, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

We are not, indeed, accustomed to think of the judgment day in terms of this standard. It is a standard so simple and obvious that in practical life we easily ignore it. And yet what could be more natural or just than that our destiny should be decided by the kind of words that we have spoken? For, as are the words, so is the man. It is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. The malice or passion that rings in the words lay first in the heart. The words are inevitably a specimen of the man. They are the creation of his inmost spirit, and the quality of that unseen spirit may be more than approximately measured by the audible words in which it habitually utters itself.

If this be so, then is not speech a much more solemn thing than we commonly suppose it to be? Think of the myriads of words that are uttered every day, and in the light of them think of the

solemn and almost appalling declaration of Jesus that for every ineffectual word that men speak they will have to give an account in the day of judgment! In one sense, every word is effectual, doubly effectual; for, on the one hand, it reveals the spirit of the speaker, and, on the other, by helping to confirm the character which it expresses, it goes to fix the speaker's destiny. In the light of the judgment, every word is thus tragically effectual; it is helping to set us on the right hand or on the left. But when the day is done, and the silence has come, and we quietly think of the words that are dead, how many of them were, in any high or noble sense, effectual? How many of them would have justified us in the judgment? Most were trivial, and many were thoughtless, and some were stupid, and perhaps a few were false and cruel—and was it not a very, very few which were effectual? Do you remember one?

It is a great thing, this human speech of ours—a terrible thing! Some, who know the awful powers and dangers that lie hidden in the heart of a word, have thought it the highest wisdom to keep the lips sealed. "Speech is silvern, Silence is golden." There are few nations without a proverb which expresses the superiority of silence to speech. Like most words which tersely embody the wisdom of humanity upon its average levels, this proverb is only partly true; it partly needs to be supplemented

by a more courageous word. There are indeed times when silence is the highest wisdom; there are other times when silence is a crime! It is a crime to say, in a moment of passion, the thing that wounds; but it is no less a crime to leave unsaid the thing that might have helped or soothed or cheered. A monastic order which enjoins perpetual silence will doubtless avoid some of the sins which beset their more loquacious fellow-mortals, but they will also lose numberless opportunities of doing good. Knives may cut our hands, but we do not therefore bury them; we learn how to use them. Nor does any man do well who deliberately surrenders the divine gift of speech because it often proves a perilous weapon, and sometimes a deadly one. Rather should we learn how to control it, and to turn the words which we all too glibly utter, into weapons for fighting the battles of the Lord. Words are the weapons of our service, which only the fewest know well how to wield. They are instruments through which we may, almost every hour of every day, be giving effect to the will of God; and to every thoughtful man the power of speech brings solemn obligations. When we have been betrayed by our too-ready tongues into some indiscretion which we may for long regret, we begin to understand the monk who wrote, "Oftentimes I could wish that I had held my peace when I had spoken, and that I had not been in company.

Why do we so willingly speak and talk with one another, when notwithstanding we seldom cease our converse before we have hurt our conscience?" But the wise man is not always the silent man; he is the man who uses words for God.

There is much that is pathetic in the history of human speech. Case-endings, which were originally full of significance, lose their freshness and force, and often vanish altogether, their place being taken, perhaps, by some prepositional phrase, whose clumsiness would have astonished the ancient men. And what has happened to the inflections has too often happened to the words themselves. They have steadily but surely been emptied of their great original content. An "awful place" used to mean a place which could touch the spirit to awe—such a place as the rugged hillside where the lonely Jacob saw the angels of God ascending and descending. It would mean something very different to-day. Great words have so often passed through careless and insincere lips that they no longer mean what they once meant. "Awfully" has, in much colloquial speech, usurped the place of "very." We use superlatives where sincerer men would use positives; for this is, in part, a question of individual and social sincerity. As strong and noble words gradually lost their meaning, they had to be reinforced by other words, and these again by other words, till the old simplicity and strength became

little more than a philological tradition. To say that a thing is good, or that we like it well, ought to be one of the highest expressions of appreciation; but that is hardly the market value of those great words to-day. The careless application of these and many similar words has deprived them of their primal strength and flavour; and part of the Christian problem to-day is just to learn to use the strong common words of our English speech with that noble sincerity which can dispense with superlatives and exaggerations.

In the last resort, this is a question of character. A man necessarily speaks as he is. It is himself that he utters. His words are his spirit rendered audible. They show what manner of man he is; they justify or condemn him. A good man will therefore be careful of all his words, but he must especially beware how he uses the great words of the Christian faith. He must be jealously on his guard lest his use of them deplete them of their divine content. There are some words whose original nobility is gone, perhaps beyond all hope of recovery; but there are others which every man should count it a privilege to keep bright and clean. We shall not lightly, for example, call every one a Christian whose name is written upon the books of the visible Church. We shall reserve that word for those who love Christ, not in word only, but in deed and truth. The right and con-

scientious use of words will strengthen the sincerity of our own soul, and will constitute our tiny contribution to the maintenance of at least one lofty ideal among the men and women about us. We shall, even in the common converse of our life, strive to realize both the dignity and the responsibility of human speech; and we shall use it cheerfully indeed, but humbly and carefully, as men who will one day have to give an account.

CONTINUALLY WITH THEE

CONTINUALLY WITH THEE

"Nevertheless I am continually with Thee"

RELIGION is the link that binds man to God, and the religious man is the man who is always sure of God. He is the man who, wherever he may be, and whatever he may be called upon to do or to bear, can say with a high heart, "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee." He is the man who counts God the great reality, and who knows himself to be the friend of God.

Now if God be indeed the great reality—if He be the creator and sustainer of all the worlds, if He be high and lifted up above all the chances and changes of mortality, and if He loves men—surely that man must be happy and secure, whose soul is stayed on such a God! For if he can believe and has reason to believe that such a Presence can and does come into his life—that his God is not merely in the heavens above or on the earth beneath, the high and holy One who inhabiteth eternity, but that He is very nigh him—is it not clear that this belief must transfigure his life, and touch it to the finest and the best that it can be?

For by his side there is a Friend—not a force, but a Friend, strong and wise and tender; not simply a force that makes for righteousness, but a living God whose love will not let him go, whose light follows all his way, and by whose law he must live.

To such a man life will indeed be a solemn and mysterious thing. He will feel himself to be standing on the shores of infinity and eternity; but the mystery is one which he will not fear, for it is the mystery of love. "As for me, I am continually with Thee. Thou dost hold me by the right hand. Thou wilt lead me across the journey of life, and guide me by Thy counsel; and afterward—when the journey is done—Thou wilt receive me to glory." To lose this faith is to let the light go out of life. One who had lost it for a time has told us that, with this negation of God, the universe to him had lost its soul of loveliness; and "although," he said, "from henceforth the precept to 'work while it is day' will doubtless but gain an intensified force from the terribly intensified meaning of the words that 'the night cometh, when no man can work,' yet when at times I think, as think at times I must, of the appalling contrast between the hallowed glory of that creed which once was mine, and the lonely mystery of existence as now I find it—at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is susceptible." These

pathetic words of George Romanes are proof enough of the desolating blight that the loss of the sense of God can cast over the human spirit.

The transforming power of religion is seen even in the religious man's attitude to nature. Probably most good men do not allow themselves to be sufficiently impressed by the sacramental aspect of nature. They call in the help of God to support them when the shadows come, but too often they forget to contemplate the glory and the love which shine through all the works which He has made—the sea and the earth and the “splendid breadth of the open sky.” There is much in nature that seems hard and cruel: in some of her moods, she seems like a very monster, “red in tooth and claw.” But to the man who has learned to look out on the world with the eyes of Jesus, it is one of the many mansions of the Father's beautiful house. He sees the Father wherever he turns his eyes. It is He who causes the sun to shine upon the just and upon the unjust, and who sends the seed-time and harvest, the summer and winter, the cold and heat, the day and night. To such a man it is never very far to God; for the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and on any spot of it the religious man may find Him. He lifts up his eyes to the stars and he sees in them “the wide and shining house of God.” He feels at home in the Universe; for the Universe is his Father's house, and he is his Father's son. He

"can be calm and free from care
On any shore, since God is there."

He is not alone, never alone, for the Father is with him, and the abiding presence of the Father is able to transfigure for him the whole world. Wherever I am, in the loneliness of a strange land, or among the silences of the night, "nevertheless I am continually with Thee."

And if this faith in God is able to transfigure the world for me, to reveal it to me as the Father's house, and light it up with the Father's love, still more is it able to transfigure my life. What an infinite difference it makes to the inner life of a man, as soon as he believes with all his soul that God is! If God is, then He has to be reckoned with. He knows my downsitting and mine uprising. There is not a word on my tongue or a thought in my heart, but, behold! *He* knows it altogether. And if He knows, what a power this should be to purify the heart and to touch the motives and purposes of life to sincerity! "Search me and try me," said one to God. There are few who would care, few who would dare, thus boldly to challenge Almighty God—few who could fling their lives open to the scrutiny of those searching eyes, and none who could do it with any success at all, but one who all the time was saying to his heart, "nevertheless I am still with Thee."

Besides securing this inner sincerity, the sense of the presence of God is fitted to impart peace and

steadfastness to the life; for the God who is evermore present is a God who cares—not a force, but a Father. When the clouds begin to sweep across our sky, it is not enough to believe that God is. If the heart would be at peace, we must believe also that He is Love, and that the rushing of the storm is but the mighty voice of that love.

Now this peace amid the blows and buffets of fortune, this power to sleep quietly in the boat when the storm is raging, belongs truly to no one but the man whose faith is stayed on God. The man who has no faith is tossed about by every wind; he is vexed by fears and misgivings. He looks into the impenetrable future, and, as he stands on the verge of the unknown, he trembles, if he thinks at all. He does not know what the days will bring, but he knows very well that they are sure to bring pain and sorrow and surprise and death. He knows that he will one day have to leave those whom he loves—he will leave them, or they will leave him, and go away to the silent land. His heart is disquieted by anxiety and fear—fear of the coming days, fear of the coming night, when he shall work no more.

But how will those doubts and fears be met by the man who believes in God? When they smite him, they will not be able to hurl him to the ground, for, in the profoundly personal language of the Bible, he knows that the Lord will hold him up. He says to his heart, "Nevertheless I am con-

tinually with thee, nevertheless Thou art continually with me." He is content with God, and he knows that, in some mysterious way, his God is working all things together for his good. In the same night in which he is betrayed, he is able to give thanks, because he knows his life is always in the hands of his Father. "Peace I leave with you," said Jesus,—with you who believe in God, and who believe also in Me. And this was no vain word. He who spoke of this peace knew well whereof He spoke. When face to face with cunning and unscrupulous controversialists, when confronted with all the majesty of imperial Rome, when cruel men were taunting Him in His dying agony, He was always quiet and sure of Himself, because He was sure of the Father.

The only truly steadfast character is that which is rooted in God. It is one thing for a man to steel himself against the assaults of what he calls fate: a very different thing it is to accept the discipline that comes with the belief that it works out a gracious purpose. Then whatever be the experience through which he may have to pass, he will believe that it is good for him to be there, that that place is to him a veritable house of God and a gate of heaven.

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BY THE WATERS OF REST

BY THE WATERS OF REST

"The Lord is my Shepherd"

THE twenty-third Psalm is a song which will live while the world lasts; for though it came from an Oriental heart and is expressed in terms of Oriental experience, it deals with the deep things of life with a simplicity so noble that it touches the heart of every generation.

The singer of this sweet song is one who has travelled far on life's way, and his path has not always been bright or smooth. He knows that there are sunny nooks and corners, that life is not all a wilderness, but that there are bright patches of green where for a brief noontide hour one may lie down and be happy. He knows that its thirst is not such as cannot be slaked, for a gracious Providence has caused the waters to bubble up and run through it, and that by the banks of its restful waters a man may quench that thirst and rest his weariness awhile. But he knows, too, that life is not all pastures of greenness and waters of rest; for has he not had to tread many a dark way, and walk through ravines where the sun never shone,

and in whose gloomy recesses there lurked dangers from robbers and beasts? Life has been a checkered experience, but throughout it all one thing has been very real to him: he has always been sure of God. In his own eyes, he is nothing but a poor, silly sheep, hungering for the green and beautiful pastures, thirsting for the refreshing waters, and prone to walk upon devious paths of his own; but as the sheep was guided and defended by the human shepherd, so was he guided and defended by that Shepherd Divine, whose care was unceasing, and whose mighty love would be with him, as he felt, "throughout the length of days." He "brings the soul back," brings it home, leads it from its crooked paths, and sets it upon his own "straight paths"—paths which lead straight to the peace of the fold; and to all this He is pledged by His own name. The sheep can count upon the Shepherd. He must be true to them, for He must be true to Himself. He does it all "for His own name's sake."

And again, men need more than food and water. In the strange pilgrimage that we call life there are dark spots where lurk beasts and men, danger and death. So what we need is One who is not only kind, but strong; and this the psalmist found in the gracious God who was the Shepherd of his life. "Yes," he says, "though I go through the valley of the deep dark shadow, even there I am

safe, and I walk through it with a fearless heart. I fear no evil; for Thou art with me." Mark how the Hebrew word for "thou" lifts itself sharply out of the sentence, and note the strong sense of God—that great Shepherd-God who loves and defends His silly sheep. "Thou art with me"—the shepherd with the sheep. How very sure this singer must have felt of God, and of His power to defend him! For look! in those kind hands of His he sees the rod and the staff—the rod on which He leans and with which He brings the sheep to Himself, and the staff with the hard wood and the great sturdy knots for beating off and braining, if need be, the wild beasts. Here is a shepherd who can not only love but defend, and whose defence brings to the poor psalmist's weak life a sense of splendid consolation; "for *they*"—as he points with pride to the rod and staff—"it is *they* that comfort me."

But, after all, the psalmist is more than a silly sheep. In his touchingly simple words, "*Thou art with me*," he has hinted that he is a friend of God; and in the second division of the psalm we see him pursued by the enemy and the avenger of blood, finding refuge and peace, hospitality and safety, within the tent of his shepherd host. Once inside the tent, he is temporarily safe. The enemies may glare at him with their fierce and cruel eyes, but the law of the desert will not let

them touch him. And he not only finds shelter, but hospitality; for this wondrous host takes pity upon the panting man who has sought the shelter of his tent. He anoints his head with oil, before him he spreads his table of good things, and he gives him with liberal hands, for his cup runneth over. "Come unto me," He seems to say, "and sup with me—thou with me and I with thee." What a meal! where the Lord sets the table with His own hands, and the poor hunted man feels himself safe and happy, while the enemy stands at the tent-door and dare not lay a finger upon him!

A hunted man? Yes; he is hunted, and we are all hunted, by the goodness of God. Note the strong, fierce word *pursue*—the very word used of the pursuit of the enemy in battle. It is as if God's love were so eager to find the man that it was determined to run him down. Look! there they are, two blessed and gentle figures, love and pity, angels twain, on the heels of every man, running and resolved to find him. And when they find him, and bring him into the quiet tent, as the guest of God, is it any wonder that he longs to dwell there "throughout the length of days"?

It is very beautiful to think that this psalm is not a prayer. The psalmist is too sure of God to pray for these things. He speaks of things whereof he knows, he tells of things that

he has seen. He has himself lain down by the green grass, and quieted his heart by the waters of rest, and he knew that it was his Shepherd-God who had brought him there. He had walked through dark valleys with a fearless heart, because he knew that the Shepherd was strong and could beat off any foe that might come upon him in the dark. So he does not pray: "O Lord, be Thou my Shepherd, and let me never want: by the green pastures do Thou lead me, and guide me to the waters of rest, and bring my soul back and cause me to walk in paths that are straight for Thy name's sake. Yea, and when I walk through the valley of the deep shadow, may I fear no evil: be Thou Thyself with me, and may Thy rod and Thy staff be my comfort. Do Thou spread a table before me in the presence of my foes, and may my cup run over. And let Thy pity and Thy love follow hard after me all the days of my life, and may I dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." That would be a beautiful prayer; but the psalmist does not thus pray, for he knows that Jehovah is all this to him, and more: and he sings over the sweet song to his own heart, for he is very sure of his Shepherd-God.

How much more, too, this psalm means to us than it could mean to the psalmist! For since Jesus came, we have seen the good Shepherd become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and

take His place beside us, to watch and guide and feed His silly sheep. It is said that in Greek inscriptions discovered in the East, one sometimes finds an Old Testament text, with the name of Christ substituted for that of Jehovah or the Lord. And surely this Christian instinct needs no apology. So let us put the name of Jesus into this dear old psalm, and see how His presence fills it with vividness and power. "Jesus is my Shepherd: I shall want for nothing. By the green pastures Jesus feeds me day by day, and to the waters of rest He guides me. Jesus brings back my soul, back from death and self to life and God. He leads me by paths that are straight for His own name's sake, because His nature and His name are love, and to this He is pledged. Yes, and when I walk through the valley of the deep shadow—valley of humiliation or sorrow or death—I fear no evil, for Jesus is with me: with His kindly crook and His strong staff He is a comfort to me. It is Jesus who spreads His table before me in the presence of my enemies—the sins and the sorrows that make life so hard and sweep it so fiercely; and it is Jesus who fills my cup to overflowing. Yes, and this Jesus who is my Shepherd and my host will never forsake me, for His love and His pity will pursue me all the days of my life, and in His father's house, where the beautiful mansions are, I will dwell for ever."

"The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his,
And he is mine, for ever.
And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house for ever!"

"Throughout the length of days:" what a wonderful phrase! Is it the length of days in this earthly life of ours? Perhaps originally it meant no more than this; but surely it is more. For to one who knows God to be the Shepherd of his life, the valley of the deep shadow will only lead from the green pastures and the quiet waters of earth to the pastures more green and the waters more quiet of heaven. For this Jesus of ours has Himself been through the valley of the deepest shadow, and He came out on the other side, and said: "Peace be unto you!" Shall we not then take heart, as we yield ourselves to the guidance of our Shepherd, who is good and wise and strong, to whom belong the pastures on this side of death and the pastures on that? And so throughout the length of days we shall praise Him—all our days in the world that now is, and then in the world everlasting.

THE FAILURE OF SUCCESS

THE FAILURE OF SUCCESS

"I pray thee, have me excused"

THE tragedy of suffering is often terrible, but it is as nothing to the tragedy of success. Not indeed that all success is tragic, but perhaps it would be true to say that all success is at least dangerous, and most of it tragic. It is always a menace to the higher life, and often its destruction. And so the quest for it is one of the most pathetic things in the world; it is as if a man were to strive, by every means and with what speed he may, to compass his own ruin.

This is a hard saying; but it was One who knew the awful possibilities of human life and destiny who said that a man was nothing profited if he gained the world at the cost of his soul. Now it is easy for us to lift ourselves lightly over the terrors of such a warning by refusing to face with candour and to consider with patience all that is implied in the word "soul." This simple word has a certain theological and somewhat unfamiliar flavour to the eager men and women who hurry along our busy streets. They would not indeed deny that they have souls, but neither would they profess to know

much about them. The state of the soul—they believe in their hearts—has no immediate bearing upon the business in hand. When they have more leisure, or when they find themselves drawing too dangerously near the borders of another world, it will be time enough to consider the demands of the soul; and by the mysterious exercise of religion, it will be saved, no doubt, in the end.

But what if for "soul" we substitute the simpler word "life"? What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his life? It is impossible for the dullest or the busiest to evade the stern simplicity of this question. We all have a life. We know what it is to love it; and unless in the throes of madness or despair, we would not lose it for all the world. Thus the statement of Jesus is true, and every one would meet it with unhesitating assent, even if we read into the word "life" the lowest meaning of which that word is capable. Clearly no one is profited if he gain the world and lose his life; for if he lost his life, he would lose the world too, and then he would be poor indeed, with nothing to identify him in all the universe.

But Jesus means something more awful even than that. Life is that spiritual power in man which gives to existence its supreme worth, and without which a man is no better than his dog or his horse. To lose this spiritual capacity is to lose everything; and even could he gain the whole world, that would

be but poor compensation for the loss of all that gives him his right to call himself a man. Of course there are multitudes for whom such a prospect has no terrors; but it would be well for all such to ask themselves whether there may not come a time when they would look back with sorrow upon their empty lives. And how will they care to face death, and, after that, the judgment?

Nothing tests a man so surely as his definition of success. He loves best that in which he is most anxious to succeed; and it is a pathetic testimony to the externalism of our standards that the men most commonly called successful are those whose wealth or worldly position has dazzled the eyes of the multitude. But is it not very plain, upon reflection, that the only successful man is the man who has most triumphantly done the real business of his life? And here we are face to face with the question which is ultimate for all of us: What is the real business of life? Is it not just to make the most and the best of ourselves, and the most through the best? In a letter to a friend, Carlyle happily defined success as "growing to your full spiritual stature under God's sky."

Yet life is to-day so departmental, and its activities are so subdivided, that hardly any one dreams of aspiring to this spiritual stature, or of endeavouring to develop his nature on all its sides; and those who dream do little more than dream. The neces-

sity of providing for ourselves and for those whom we love, develops our nature along certain restricted lines, and with this we soon learn to content ourselves; while all the time, other and often nobler powers within us are slumbering or dying. And though we walk about the world with bright and happy faces and all seems well with us, it may be very far from well. The spirit within may be shrunken and withered—a piteous and ghastly sight for those who have the eyes to see.

Under modern conditions, success, as commonly understood, lies in doing one thing well; and it is sadly true that most men contrive to do one thing well by neglecting things of at least as much importance as those which they consider. The attitude of ordinary men to the highest things has been immortalized by Jesus in His parable of the supper. It was a great supper this—worthy of so generous a host—and guests of all sorts were invited. But as soon as the table was spread and they had nothing to do but come, they all began to excuse themselves. One had to see to his cattle, another to his fields, another to his home; and so they allowed business and pleasure to shut them out of the banqueting-hall. They cared more for the oxen and the land than for the great King who had graciously asked them to come in to Him and sup with Him; and their terrible, but reasonable, doom was that they should never taste of His supper. If they should

come, they would find the doors shut, and they would be left in the darkness with the weeping and the wailing.

The great supper is spread to-day for all who will come and partake of it. The Lord openeth His hand and is willing to satisfy the desires of every living thing; but for the highest things of all there is but little desire. The cattle and the land, the office and the home, the buying and the selling, the planning and the scheming, are more to us than fellowship at the same table with the great and the good and the Lord of all. We cheat ourselves of our birthright, and the paltry success we may win in our profession is bought with a great and terrible price. "Born a man and died a grocer"—some such epigram would be but too truthful a summary of many a life-story; born to a splendid heritage, born with powers of large possibilities, whose proper cultivation would have brought to their possessor knowledge and influence and joy—and died with most of those powers strangled by the murderous routine of professional life.

Doubtless every man's profession is a divine school of discipline. It is by doing its duties that he develops his capacities and attains to any power that is ever his. But to most men it proves a prison as well as a school. They can see little of the great and beautiful world beyond the cruel bars of their window, and they seldom travel beyond the court-

yard. In allowing our work to develop us, we ought not to allow it unduly to restrict us; for all things are ours. The music and the art and the literature and the beauty of the world are all for us. Could any folly be more tragic than to stand in the presence of all these things, and say, "I pray thee, have me excused"? Most men go to their graves without ever having known how much was theirs, how large and glorious the world is, or how rich and happy their life might have been. In their exclusive attention to their business, profession or home, they commit a slow intellectual or spiritual suicide; and this is one of the ways in which a man may gain the world and lose his soul.

The famous words of Darwin should be taken to heart by those who feel that they are giving their exclusive affection to the work of their lives, however important and honourable that may be. "Up to the age of thirty," he says, "or beyond it, poetry of many kinds, such as the works of Milton, Gray, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare, especially in the historical plays. . . . Pictures gave me considerable, and music very great, delight. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry. I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost my taste for pictures or music. . . .

I retain some taste for fine scenery, but it does not cause me the exquisite delight which it formerly did. . . . My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts. . . . If I had to live my life again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once every week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature."

Over certain minds the claims of trade and commerce exercise a powerful and sometimes a deadly fascination; but this touching confession makes it plain that it is just as possible for those engaged more directly in the things of the mind and spirit to limit the fulness of their manhood and to deaden themselves to interests that might have been a source both of power and pleasure. The preacher who has no mind for anything but his sermon, no interest in any form of literature which he cannot bring before his people in the form of exposition or exhortation, has committed a crime against himself, if not also against them; for he has closed his eyes to some of the avenues along which God sends truth to men. Literature is larger than the sermon, and truth is not confined to commentaries. The

whole earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; and He has given it all, and not merely a fraction of it, to the sons of men and to the preachers of His word. The preacher, like other men, is asked to the great supper; and he is tempted, like other men, for professional reasons, to plead, "I pray thee, have me excused." But here, as often elsewhere, it is true that he who excuses, accuses himself.

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BIDDING GOOD-BYE TO GOD

BIDDING GOOD-BYE TO GOD

"Go thy way for this time"

WHAT would you think of a man who had plainly heard the voice of God—heard it so plainly that it made him tremble—and who yet had the awful courage to reply, "Go away for the present. When I have a convenient season, I will send for thee" ? We hold our breath at the very thought of such stupid, lordly defiance of Almighty God; and then we breathe more freely again as we bethink ourselves that such a thing could not be. It could not be? Nay, but it has been. There was a man who rolled those very words off his thoughtless tongue, and there are other men—have we not ourselves been among them?—who have cherished such thoughts in our hearts, and sighed for God to go away, though the blasphemous words may never actually have crossed our lips.

Felix was the man—the cruel, the powerful, the gorgeous Felix. Beside him is a prisoner speaking to him with deadly earnestness of a judgment to come. The voice is Paul's, but the words are God's, and they smite with terror into his seared

Roman conscience. Paul is right, God is right, and Felix can stand it no longer. "Go away," he says, in a sudden access of terror. "Go away for the present. When I have a convenient season, I will send for thee." It is to Paul that he is speaking, but what are those awful words but a tragic farewell to God,—the God who was pleading with him through the mighty presence of Paul?

What a prayer! "O God! go away." It is a fearful thing to bid good-bye to God, but oh! the presumption, the pathetic, the unspeakable presumption, of expecting that the God to whom we have haughtily said 'good-bye will come back at our summons, and alter His plans to suit our convenient season!

We do not indeed suppose that we ourselves could ever be so haughtily disobedient to the heavenly voice. If only we could be sure that a voice was God's, we would obey it swiftly and gladly; but the pain of life is that its silences are so long, and so seldom broken by a voice which we can with confidence welcome as divine. But is that voice so very rare? or is it not rather that we have not schooled ourselves to understand the language in which it speaks? For it sometimes speaks as a rising terror in the heart. So it was with Felix. His conscience was alarmed by the vision of a judgment to come, and in that terror God was speaking to him. That is one of God's

ways of speaking to men. When the still small voice would be lost upon us, He will sometimes let us hear the distant roll of His judgment thunder. Then let us not pray in our terror, "O God! go Thy way for the present." Rather, let us make our peace with the God of the storm, lest His lightnings consume us.

But His voice is not always terrible; it can be gentle too. Sometimes it is borne to us upon the breath of holy impulses or simple affections. But whether that voice thrills us with terror or with sacred resolve, it is for us unhesitatingly to obey its promptings. God is with us in such a moment, laying His kindly hand upon our stubborn life. How do we know that He will ever be with us again?

Procrastination is the secret of failure. A noble thought, a holy resolution, visits us. It stands knocking at the door. But it will disturb our comfort if we suffer it to enter and possess our life, and that will not do. So we give it a courteous dismissal. "Go thy way for the present. When I have a convenient season, I will send for thee." And before that season comes, we may have reached some place where there is no repentance, though we seek it carefully with tears.

Warnings enough there come to every man. Every time we are appalled, like Felix, at the thought of the judgment to come; every terror

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that shakes our conscience; every funeral procession that passes up the busy streets, with its silent mockery of their crowded haste; every experience that awes and humbles us,—is another voice of the God who loves us too dearly to leave us alone. The man who says to such a voice, "Go thy way for the present," is either a coward or a fool,—a coward if he cannot bear to look at those stern facts with which he will one day have to make his bed, and a fool if he supposes that the God whom he is deliberately rejecting will come in mercy when he summons Him. "When I have a more convenient season I will send for Thee." Yes, but will He come? He will come indeed, be sure of that; but, when He comes, He will demand the uttermost farthing.

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A DESERT PLACE

A DESERT PLACE

"Come apart into a desert place"

FEW sentences in the New Testament are more pathetic than this: "There were many coming and going, and the apostles of Jesus had no leisure so much as to eat." Jesus had sent them away to do their beneficent work upon the bodies and the minds of men. They had done it; and now they had come back and gathered about Him to tell Him of all that had befallen them. Jesus listened with an interest mingled with joy and pity. He knew that for the happy prosecution of the work of life men need not only enthusiasm but strength. And so when their tale is told, He simply says, "Come by yourselves apart into a desert place, and take a little rest." And in words of simple pathos, the evangelist adds, "For crowds were coming and going, and they had not even a chance to eat." So, at the Master's bidding, they entered a boat and went away to a desert place apart.

This is indeed very touching; but the sequel is more touching still. For the kind wish of Jesus was defeated by the importunity of the crowd; and

when they crossed to their desert place where they had hoped to be by themselves apart, they found the place crowded with a waiting throng that had hurried round the lake on foot. The work had to be begun again, and the repose seemed further off than ever. In the attitude of Jesus to this new and unexpected obligation, we get a glimpse into the depths of His great heart. An ordinary man would have resented the appearance of a crowd which so effectively dispelled all hope of repose and deprived Him and His of the rest they so sorely needed. But not so Jesus. "When He landed and saw the great crowds, He had pity upon them and began to teach them many things." Those who had come to Him in such a way He could in no wise cast out. The seeming annoyance He accepted as a divine opportunity, and tired and disappointed as He and His disciples were, He gladly and uncomplainingly began again the great work which His Father had given Him to do.

It is worth pondering that Jesus deliberately sought for Himself and His disciples to escape from the crowd. It is also worth pondering that that escape proved impossible. In such a world as ours we are sometimes compelled by circumstances, or by regard for some high moral law, or for the sake of a needy brother, to act against our better knowledge. We know very well that we must spare ourselves, or our strength—and to that ex-

tent, our efficiency—will be impaired. Yet the circumstances of our life so arrange themselves that to spare ourselves is impossible; and so long as we have strength to stand upon our feet, we must go on with our work. These exacting demands, which seem at times so cruel, have no doubt their high compensations both here and hereafter; but while we must learn the stern obligation of service from the willingness of Jesus to do what He could for the crowd at the very time that He so yearned to be alone with His disciples, we have also to learn from His desire that they should go apart—and perhaps many of us need this lesson still more—how indispensable is rest and loneliness to all continued and effective work.

It is not without interest that the words for "come" and "rest" which Jesus used in His invitation to the disciples, are the same as those in which He gave to all that laboured and were heavy laden that other invitation which has rung as an evangel throughout the centuries: "Come unto me and I will give you rest." Perhaps here, too, in the suggestion that they go to a desert place, there is a similar undertone. Not merely in the desert place will the inspiration be; for Jesus is to be there too. Nor is it only through going apart by themselves that they will renew their strength; for they are to go apart with Him. But all the same, the passage sounds an immortal warning to men

who are consumed by zeal for the work to which they are giving their lives. The strongest and the most zealous need to go apart into a desert place and rest awhile. They need it for their own sake; they need it for their work's sake. Much of the work has to be done "in the midst of the street"; and we can only possess our souls there in patience and peace if we have rested for awhile apart in the desert place.

"They had no leisure so much as to eat." There lies the real pathos of the situation—and the peril, too. If a man has no leisure to eat; if he is compelled, as business and professional men often are, to dine irregularly, nature, which is just, will make him pay the penalty. Sooner or later his strength and elasticity will be impaired; the man and his work will suffer. In the deeper sense, too, this holds. For that eating by which we sustain the physical nature is a symbol of the assimilative effort by which we sustain the higher nature of mind or spirit; and if we have no leisure to partake of this food, to enrich our minds with new ideas and refresh our spirits at the well-springs of devotion, then in the long run our work cannot fail to be languid and poor. There is no alternative. We cannot give what we do not have. We cannot feed others by starving ourselves. The teacher, the preacher, the physician, the writer, all who would helpfully touch the lives of others, must know

something of the desert place. If they are always with the crowd, they will slowly, but surely, lose their power of helping it.

It was to satisfy two needs that Jesus urged upon His disciples this escape from the crowd—the need of aloofness and the need of rest. First, “Come by yourselves apart.” The disciples had no doubt enjoyed some measure of success in their mission, and they may have been a little elated by their temporary popularity. At any rate, it was now time for them to go apart by themselves, away from the disturbing illusions of the crowd, to a desert place where they could view themselves and their work in truer perspective. A crowd is a terrible thing and a good man may well fear it. He will fear its false standards of success. He will fear he come to measure his worth by the size of his crowd. He will fear lest he come to care more for their applause than to tell them the truth. Yes, the crowd is a menace to a man’s true estimate of himself; and as he loves his soul, he will once in a while leave it all for the desert place where there is little to turn his head or distort his vision of the eternal things. “For my part,” said Stevenson, “I should try to secure some part of every day for meditation, above all, in the early morning and the open air.” Apart from men, and, above all, in the healthful presence of the primeval things, the sky, the mountains, the sea, we can look ourselves more

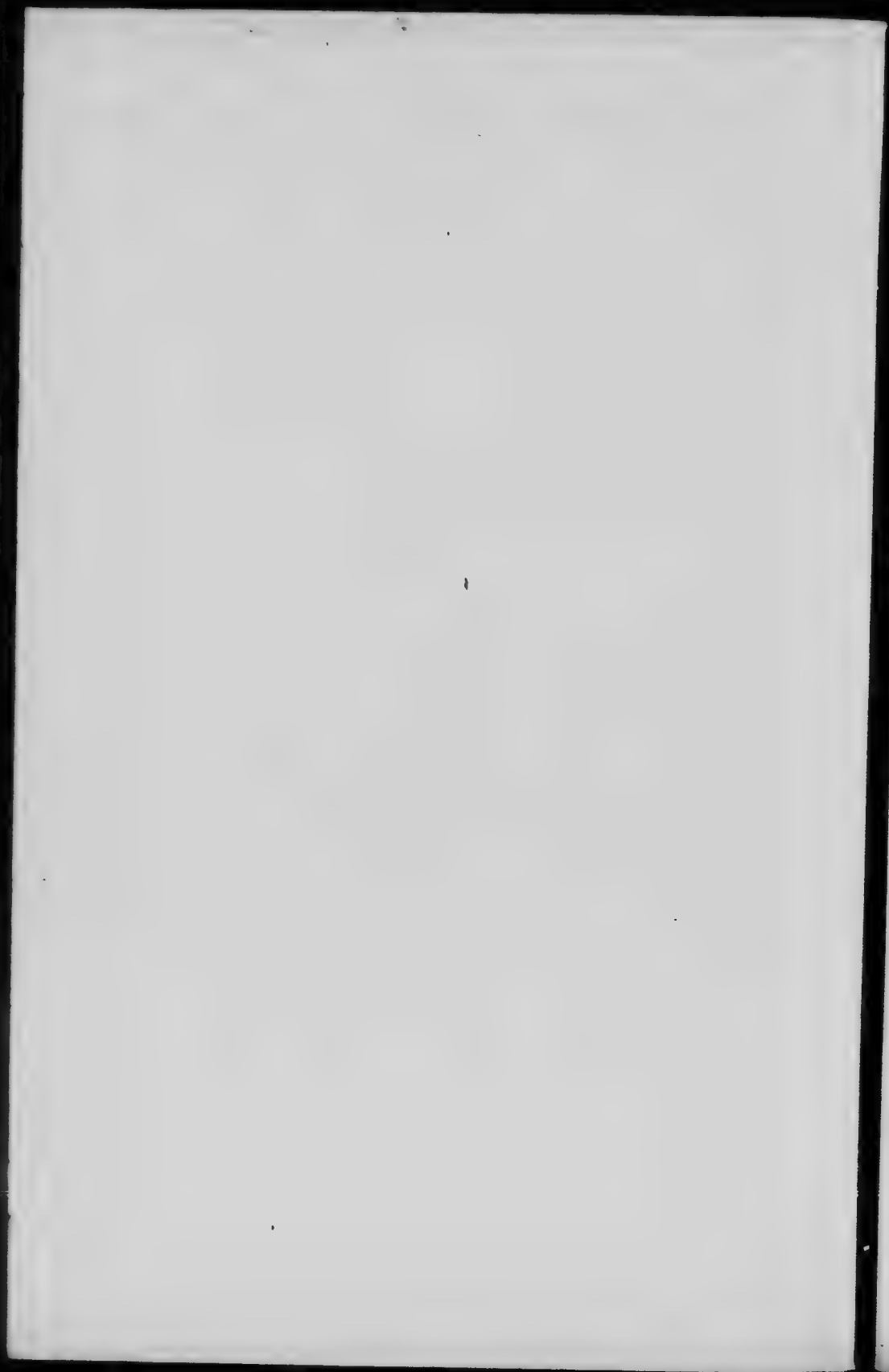
honestly in the face, lift up our hearts to God, and give our panting lives a chance.

Again, besides going apart, Jesus bade His disciples take a little rest. The crowd has to be feared for its power to lower our ideals, but also for its power to exhaust our strength and impair our real efficiency. This is the terrible penalty of popularity, that it deprives its victim of the opportunity of sustaining his power upon its highest levels. Day by day his life is remorselessly eaten into. His message becomes first familiar and then commonplace, because the crowd will not let him do his best. There is something pathetic as well as inspiring about the numberless meetings which some churches contrive to organize. They are in one sense a sign of vitality; dead men do not hold meetings. But they are also perhaps a sign of that restlessness which finds its satisfaction anywhere but in the desert place. It is often just the way in which good people take their dissipation.

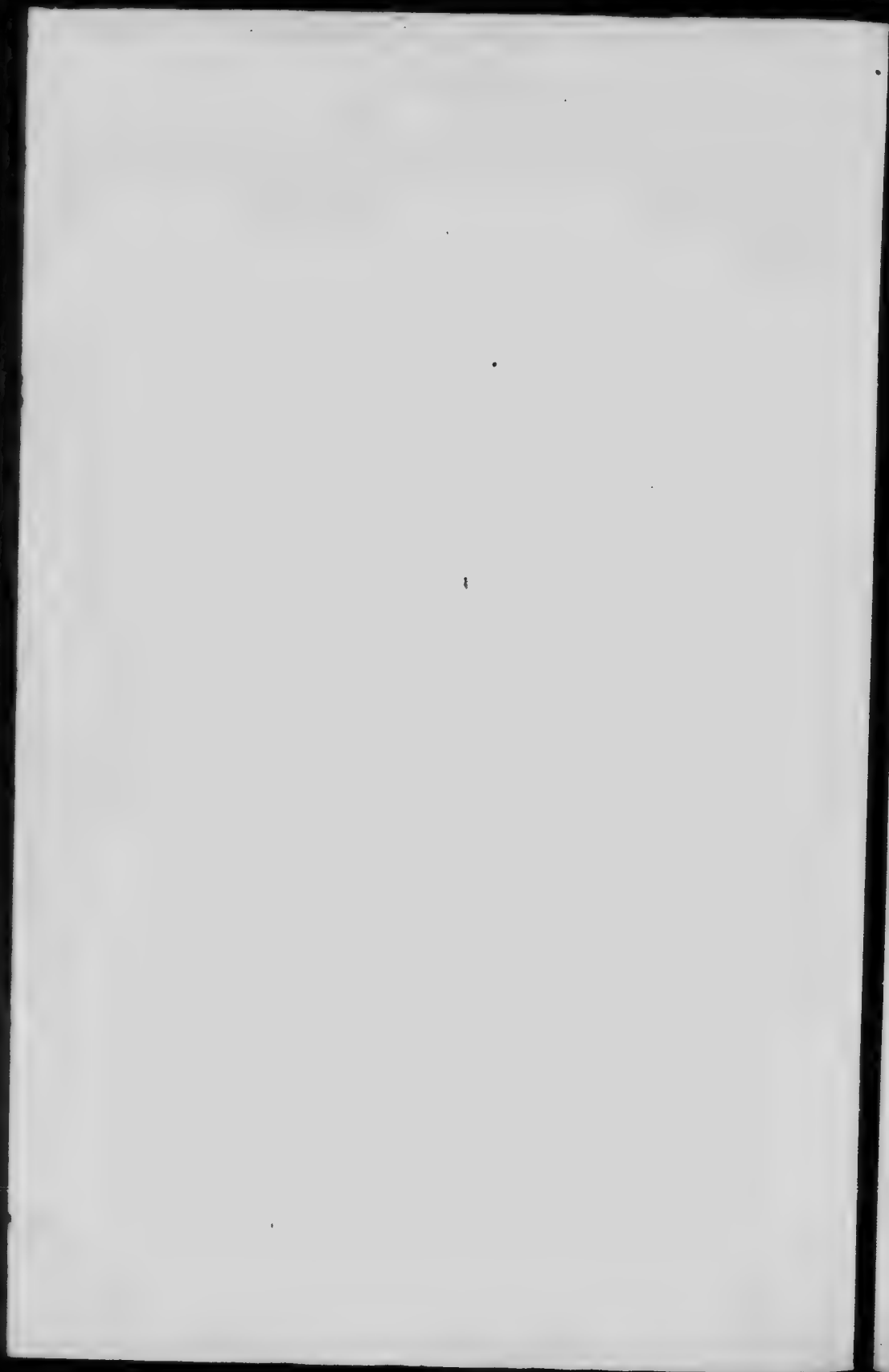
And besides fostering in them a somewhat restless and superficial type of spiritual life, it imposes a burden almost too heavy to be borne upon the unfortunate men who, several times a week, are called upon to address such gatherings. It is no doubt possible to speak many times a month for many years together with real power and efficiency. The thing has been done, though one may question whether it has been done often. But in any

case it can only be done well by leaving the crowd and resting awhile. To the highest form of work rest is an absolute necessity. No man who knows anything of the conditions of his noblest work or the limits of human endurance could doubt for one moment that the blessed Sabbath day is a divine institution. Its recurrence is a perpetual reminder of the need of going apart and resting awhile. The strength that is not renewed will soon become weakness.

When Père Didon had been banished to Corsica, Pasteur wrote to him : "You will come back with your soul still loftier, your thought more firm, more disengaged from earthly things." Most of the world's best work has been done by men who prepared for it in some desert place. Jesus began His own ministry with a season in the wilderness, and often afterwards he sought the loneliness of the mountain side. Paul had his Arabia, and John Bunyan his prison. The street has its place in the religious life, but so also has the desert. He will work best for the crowd who has rested in the wilderness. And not less needful than when first it was spoken is this healing word of Jesus to the crowded and distracted lives of men to-day : "Come by yourselves apart into a desert place and rest yourselves awhile."



IN THE MIDST OF THE STREET



IN THE MIDST OF THE STREET

WHAT would you expect to find in the midst of the street? The din of endless traffic, and the hurrying of eager feet. This at any rate; but there is more. On the great streets of great cities a thousand interests and passions concentrate themselves. There the rich and the poor meet and pass, and in their meeting one of the great problems of the modern world passes before us incarnate. There the tragedies and comedies of life jostle each other unsuspectingly. Innocence walks by the side of guilt. The deadliest sins masquerade before our faces, sometimes with stealthy tread, sometimes brazen and unashamed. Ambition, hypocrisy, poverty, cunning, vice, and much else that is unlovely and degrading, might be seen any day in the midst of the street by one who could read beneath the lines upon the faces.

But is that all? If that were indeed all, civilization would be a tragic thing, and history had better speedily close in some grand catastrophe. If that were all, then Christ has come in vain, and religion has drained its lifeblood for nothing. No, there is more in the midst of the street than that. The man

who has not yet learned the fatal art of cynicism will find there much to confirm his faith in the potential nobleness of human nature. If he can read aright the faces that pass before him, he would see many a simple heroism, many a pain and sorrow bravely borne, many a sacrifice readily made with no hope of compensation. It is very possible to misread the significance of the endless panorama in the midst of the street. It is very certain that if we do not look upon it with generous eyes, we shall not see one half of its meaning and beauty.

But was there ever half so beautiful a street as that seen by the aged eyes of the seer of Patmos? In a loving description of the new Jerusalem, the city that descended from God out of heaven, he noticed that in the midst of the street there was a river, and on either side of the river there were trees—trees of life. A tree in the street! And what a tree! Ever young and fair, bearing fruit all the year round, and dressed in leaves which were able to heal the sick and torn nations of the world as soon as they entered this street of the city of God and plucked thereof. Beautiful street of a beautiful city! If only our unbelieving eyes could catch a sight of such a street with the magic, beneficent tree in the midst of it, how eagerly we too would run to pluck its leaves and heal our distracted hearts!

But what is it that keeps us back? Why do we not see the city? And why do we not eat of the fruit of this tree of life? Is it because they are so far away? Perhaps they are not so far as we think. For this city, remember, is not in the heavens; it is a city that came down out of heaven upon the earth. Call it, if you like, a dream city; but it is a dream of this world, and not of the skies. For, note, there are nations to be healed. The work of the world is not yet done. Its nations are sick; the mind and the heart are not sound; they need healing. And they find it on the leaves of the tree in the street of the city of God. So it would seem as if the vision that sustained the aged heart of this true seer was that of some heavenly city in this world. True, there lies upon this city a wondrous light, such as never was on sea or land; and no city that has ever been built by human hands can compare with it for the nobility of its inhabitants. But it seems, after all, to be a city set up upon the earth, inhabited not by spirits but by living men, with the living God among them.

So, while this is a dream, it is not all a dream; it can be made the most practical of all realities. For, surrounded as most of us are by the stubborn and often ungracious facts of city life, by its fierce competitions and its unremitting strain, it is well to remember that the tree of life is in the midst of

the street. Often we are tempted to think it is anywhere but there. A tree of life in a street which rings with the noise of business and commercial rivalries seems almost a mockery. Often we would fain fly from it all to some lodge in the wilderness or in the forest or on the sea-shore. Early man imagined the tree of life in a garden—the glorious garden of Paradise; but it is a deeper thought, as it is a later one, that this tree is in the midst of the street, where the men are.

Wherever men are gathered together, there is some not altogether ignoble life. For the existence of cities, when you come to think of it, is a recognition, however unconscious, of the brotherhood of men and of their need of one another. Every one who is honestly working is doing something for that great organism which we call society; each, in doing his own work, is serving the others—it may be unwittingly—and blessing the whole. Where two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, there He is in the midst of them, to bless them; and where hundreds and thousands are gathered together in the interests of a common civilization, we may well believe that Jesus is not far away, though there is not a little on which He could only look with eyes of sorrow. And we may well believe that there is a tree of life somewhere in the midst.

The inspiration of the street! Such a phrase

seems almost an absurdity. The poets have, with few exceptions, ignored the street, and sought their inspiration amid the quiet and gracious scenes of nature, or in the quaint, simple life of the country. It has been left to religion and social philosophy to discover the tree of life in the midst of the street. The religion inaugurated by Jesus is very much more than the saving of the individual soul; it is the salvation of each for the service of all. Is it not plain, then, that the concentration of the city offers the grandest opportunity? There it is as easy to reach and move a hundred as elsewhere to touch one. There life is most complicated and interesting. There the problems are fiercest and the need sorest. There opportunities are most numerous and most easily secured. There thorough work finds its most comprehensive response and its most manifold reward. Already, despite much open and secret corruption, there exists within every city much good and true life, organized and unorganized; it is for those who believe in the city of God to deepen and strengthen this life, to concentrate its scattered forces, and to plant it in the hearts and in the institutions where it does not yet exist.

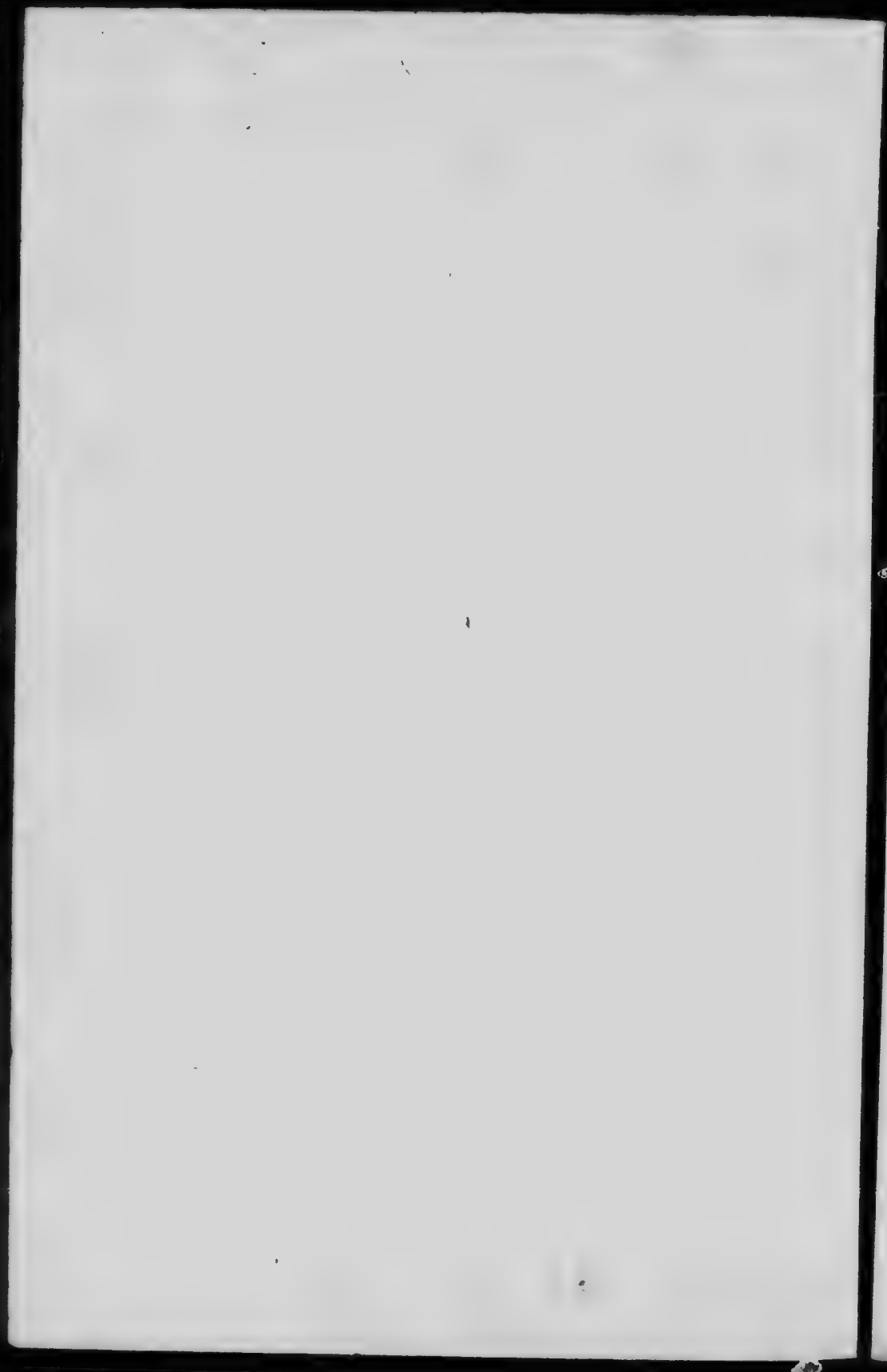
The obligations of religion to the street and to all that ramified social life which the street implies, are very great. Jesus loved the street. There were indeed times when He had to bid His disciples go

apart into a desert place and rest awhile; but it was that they might enter on their work again with strength renewed. He left the wilderness in which He sojourned for a while after the call to His ministry, to work among the busy haunts of men in the cities on the shore of the lake of Galilee. The city, its needs and its redemption, were ever in His thoughts. He would fain have gathered her people together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. He did not shirk the responsibilities of the unlovely street. To him it was not unlovely; it was the field on which he believed that, in the far-off day, there would be a golden harvest.

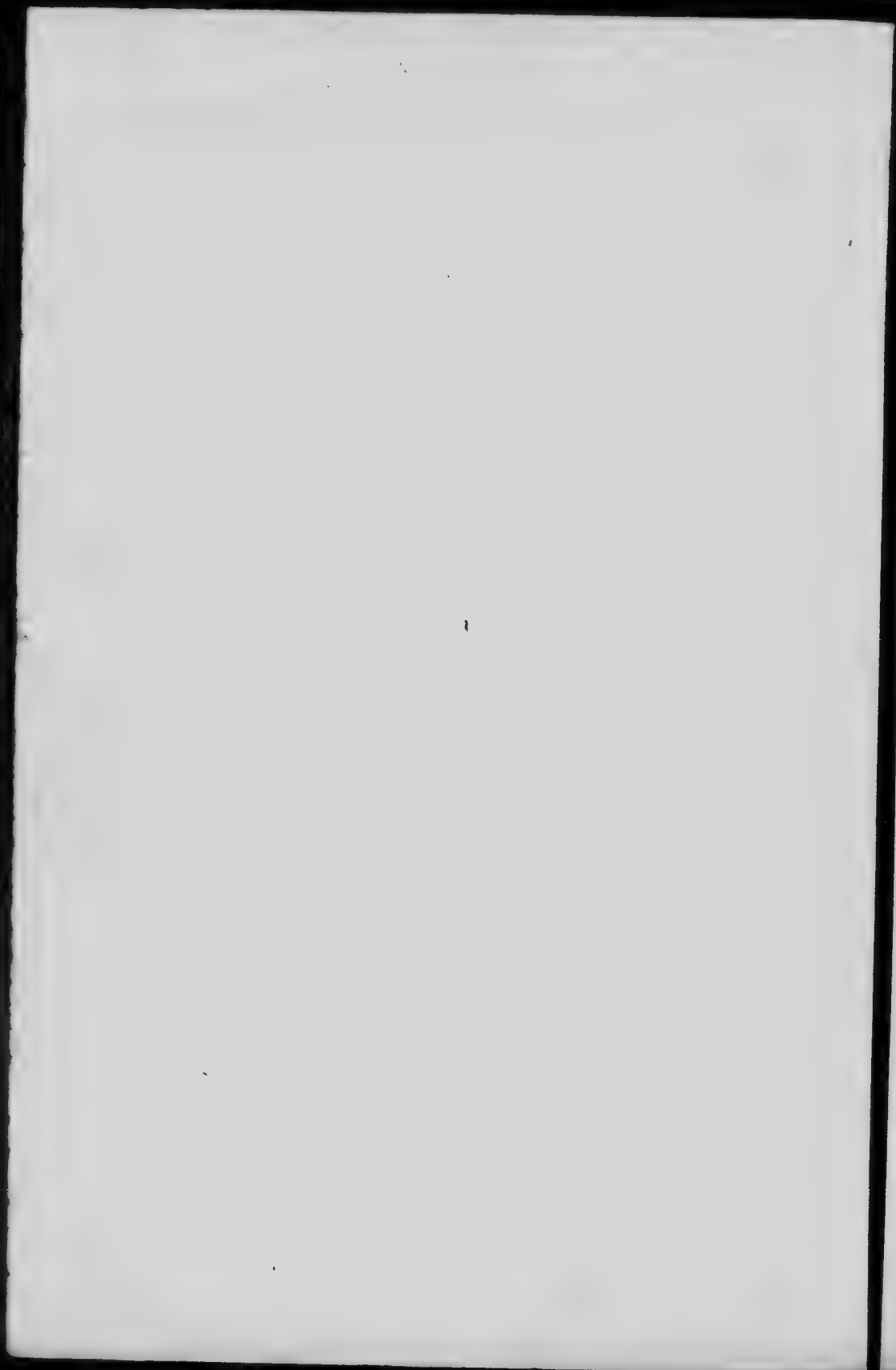
The tree of life was in the midst of the street, and its leaves were for the healing of the nations. That vision, seen so long ago, is yet strangely modern and peculiarly full of meaning for the men of to-day. It is the vision of the opportunity and the responsibility of social life. There is already life in the midst of the street; but there is earnest need of more and better life. For the redemption of the street is yet a long way off. The streets of our world are like those in the parable—full of poor and maimed, blind and lame; and the Master is saying to us, as the master in the parable said to his servants, "Go out quickly into the streets, and bring them in hither."

Nor does the obligation cease when those in the streets of our own cities have been brought in. It

stretches out to the regions beyond; for the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. Christianity is a social force; but the society on which it is designed to operate is the whole world. It will be content with nothing less than a redeemed world. But it does its work through redeemed personalities; and it lies with each of those who believe in God and have been quickened by Jesus to play some deliberate part in the slow transformation of the world till it becomes the kingdom of our God and of His Christ; and then there will be no curse any more.



THE RIVER AND THE DEAD SEA



THE RIVER AND THE DEAD SEA

"Everything shall live, whithersoever the river cometh"

It has long been the fashion to regard Ezekiel as a legalist, with little of the old prophetic fire and imagination. But the man who drew for us the immortal pictures of the valley of dry bones and of the river of life that proceeded from the temple of God, must rank as one of the poets and prophets of the world. The earlier parts of his description of the river, where his Divine guide comes forth with a line in his hand, and four times measures the depth of its waters, after a thousand cubits of its progress eastward, may seem somewhat mathematical and unimaginative. But when he brings us out upon the Dead Sea, and we watch the fishing-boats that move along its western shores; when he shows us the trees, whose leaves and fruit are deathless, that fringe the wonderful river on both its banks; then we feel that we are in the hands of a great poet, who looked with eyes of love and hope upon the world, and who saw deep into the heart of things.

The whole passage indeed exhibits the pro-

phetic imagination in one of its most daring and splendid flights. Ezekiel and his people are still in the land of exile—they are doomed to remain there for at least over thirty years, and, so far as human eye could see, for ever. But, so sure is the prophet that Jehovah will bring His people back to their own land, that he actually draws up a minute and elaborate programme for the re-organization of the Church on their return. Even in the Bible, with its hope invincible flashing from every page, there is nothing more sublime than this—that, by the waters of Babylon, where the national hopes seemed to be for ever extinguished, and there was nothing left for the exiles but to hang up their harps upon the willow trees and weep, as they thought of their beloved Jerusalem, which they were never likely to see again—there is nothing more sublime than this, that a prophet could not only see beyond the immediate sorrow, in some vague way, to a brighter day, but that he saw it all so clearly and confidently that he prepares and minutely plans for it.

Now of this new national life, the temple is to be the very centre and core. Like our Lord, he has a large imagination of the Church and her destiny; the gates of Hades should not prevail against her. This explains the elaborate attention which the affairs of the temple receive through a succession of chapters which to us, who are afar

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off, may seem dreary enough. But, dreary as they may seem to us of another age and country, they glow with the enthusiasm of the man who penned them; the plans for the temple were drawn by an eager and loving hand. In this great description of the river of life, however, he carries us to ground upon which he can stir our own interest more readily. His pictures may seem to us, in part, mechanical and fantastic, if not grotesque; but it is not difficult for a sympathetic imagination to appreciate the thing Ezekiel would be at, or to share his hopeful and eager wonder at the possibilities of the future time, when the Church shall have secured her true place in the land and in the hearts of the people.

We must first, however, beware of putting too spiritual an interpretation upon the imagery of Ezekiel. In large measure, he literally means what he says. To us, such a river, with such a course, flowing from the temple eastward across the Judæan hills and falling into the Dead Sea, may well appear a physiographical absurdity. But that the prophet means himself to be taken seriously is plain from his circumstantial picture of the fishermen casting their nets upon the waters between Engedi on the west and Eneglaim on the north. He means that, when the world is redeemed, there will be no place in it for a desert and a Dead Sea. These things, too, shall share in

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the redemption; the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose, and the Dead Sea shall become alive again. The earth, as well as the men upon it, shall be transfigured; and it is primarily this physical transfiguration that Ezekiel has in view, when he describes the effect of the river of life.

At the same time, it would not be untrue to the spirit of Ezekiel's message, to find in it truths directly applicable to our modern needs and situation. The waters of the river are said to proceed from the sanctuary; does that not suggest that the Church should be a river of life, and that from her, influences should stream which would bless and beautify and fertilize the world?

Very near every Church is the desert and the Dead Sea—the rough, jagged hills on which nothing grows and over which men stumble, and the sea in whose waters no fish swims, and on whose surface no ship floats. Round about the Church is a dreary desolation; what is she doing to impart to it life and beauty? The life that is in her should flow out of her to the regions beyond, especially to the places where the need is sorest. The stream that Ezekiel saw, as soon as it left the temple, made straight for the east, for the Dead Sea—for that was the region of death, the region that most needed life and blessing.

The true Church will go to the waste places,

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where she is most sorely needed. And, as she goes in the direction ordained for her by the needs of the world about her, she will gather strength. The water may not be deep or strong for the first thousand cubits; but the farther the stream of her influence advances, the deeper and stronger will it become. Beauty will spring up wherever she goes; her banks will be shaded with lovely trees; what once was desolation she will turn into a Paradise, and her influence will quicken the lifeless into life.

The water from Ezekiel's temple flowed east; and the stream of our Church's activity will also flow east—east to India and China, where heathenism has left its blight and desolation, and human needs are very sore; east to the slums of our cities, where life is sordid and the battle is hard. But to the west no less than to the east; for the west, too, has its gorgeous desolations, and there the Church must be prepared to cut a channel for her streams. She will go, if we may adopt the happy mistranslation of the Greek version, to "Galilee and Arabia"—to Galilee in the north and Arabia in the south, to the uttermost ends of the earth. Where the dreary and the thirsty places are, there must she be, with the water of life.

The background of this vision is a sick and hungry world. This is incidentally suggested by the very last words of the description, where the fruit

of the beautiful trees upon its banks is to be for food, and their leaves for healing. Food for the famished and healing for the sick souls of men! These things the Church must be able to provide, or she is no Church. The trees, with their wholesome fruit and health-giving leaves, are nourished by the waters of the river, and the river has its source in the house of God—the whole being finely symbolic of the vital and healing influences that ought to stream forth from the Church upon society. Too often the life of the Church is enclosed within the four walls of the outer court, and not the eastern gate alone, but all the gates are closed, so that those without cannot pass within and those within will not pass without. No stream of life has gone forth from it to bless the surrounding world. The waste places have remained waste, even those that were only a thousand cubits from the door; and the Dead Sea, only a few miles off, has remained dead. In that case must we not say that the Church herself is dead? If the water will not run, if the stream will not flow, it is stagnant. Some churches either do not move at all, or move away from the districts where the people with their problems are crowded together, out to the sunny, pleasant places where there is comfort and room. If the Church is alive, she must move; but if she understands her duty, she will move *towards the Dead Sea*.

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Very suggestive of the true function of the Church is the frequency of the word *life* throughout this passage. "Everything shall live, whithersoever the river cometh." As on the Dead Sea, where once reigned silence, are now boats and fish and nets and fishermen, when its waters are touched by the waters of the river, so life will spring up wherever a Church is true to her high mission. Everything shall live whithersoever the river of her life cometh. If this is not literally true, it is ideally true. She has food and healing to offer all who are willing to be fed and healed by her. She can express her life in an infinite variety of ways, for not once, but twelve times a year, do her trees yield their fruit; and she has an inexhaustible power of adapting herself to the various needs of men.

The prophet, or preacher, is a messenger of life. He stands in the silent valley of bones and speaks the word which brings the dead to life again. And the Church must also be a messenger of life. With living preachers and a living Church, the world's redemption would not be very far off. The preacher by his word of power, would, by the blessing of God, compel the sleeping Church to stand upon its feet—an exceeding great army; and this living army would go out, to the north and the south, to the east and the west, to Galilee and Arabia, to the dreary hills of Judæa and the

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silent waters of the lifeless sea, to the highways and the byways, to the waste, the lifeless, the unpromising places, carrying healing and blessing and life wherever they went. Then the world would be transfigured, and this old earth of ours would be a very Paradise of God.

